

Concordia University St. Paul

**DigitalCommons@CSP**

---

CUP Ed.D. Dissertations

Concordia University Portland Graduate  
Research

---

9-29-2019

## Professional Mentoring at a Christian Predominantly White Institution: Impacts on the Social Connections of African American Students

Steve Taylor

Concordia University - Portland, [steve.taylor@cuw.edu](mailto:steve.taylor@cuw.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup\\_commons\\_grad\\_edd](https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_commons_grad_edd)

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Taylor, S. (2019). *Professional Mentoring at a Christian Predominantly White Institution: Impacts on the Social Connections of African American Students* (Thesis, Concordia University, St. Paul). Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup\\_commons\\_grad\\_edd/380](https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_commons_grad_edd/380)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia University Portland Graduate Research at DigitalCommons@CSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in CUP Ed.D. Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSP. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csp.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csp.edu).

Concordia University - Portland

**CU Commons**

---

Ed.D. Dissertations

Graduate Theses & Dissertations

---

9-29-2019

## Professional Mentoring at a Christian Predominantly White Institution: Impacts on the Social Connections of African American Students

Steve Taylor

*Concordia University - Portland*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.cu-portland.edu/edudissertations>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### CU Commons Citation

Taylor, Steve, "Professional Mentoring at a Christian Predominantly White Institution: Impacts on the Social Connections of African American Students" (2019). *Ed.D. Dissertations*. 332.

<https://commons.cu-portland.edu/edudissertations/332>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Theses & Dissertations at CU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ed.D. Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CU Commons. For more information, please contact [libraryadmin@cu-portland.edu](mailto:libraryadmin@cu-portland.edu).

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE  
CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Steven P. Taylor

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

James Therrell, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Michael Self, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Floralba A. Marrero, Ed.D., Content Reader

Professional Mentoring at a Christian Predominantly White Institution: Impacts on the Social  
Connections of African American Students

Steven P. Taylor

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Higher Education

James Therrell, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Michael Self, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Floralba A. Marrero, Ed.D., Content Reader

Concordia University–Portland

2019

## **Abstract**

Private Christian universities with predominantly Caucasian student bodies have historically faced difficulty when attempting to become more diverse. Often these colleges' student populations have mimicked that of the founding parent church, although many desire to broaden the student ethnic background. The purpose of this qualitative single case study research was to examine the impacts of mentoring by professional, full-time, university employees on African American students' social connections. Positive, social connections improve student retention and satisfaction. This study was conducted at a single Christian PWI university in the Midwest. Data included personal interviews and a combined focus group with four African American students, a focus group of five mentors, and key documents. The three main themes identified include that the mentee was able to build a significant relationship with his/her mentor, the process reduced student isolation, and students grew in their campus involvement. In each of these major themes, three additional subthemes add depth regarding the students' growth in their social connections. The outcomes of this study support the need for future research to investigate the importance and validity of Christian PWI universities in the support of African American students, as well as those from other ethnic backgrounds. Programs intended to promote meaningful social connections with mentors, peers, teachers, and the campus as a whole as means to increase retention and diversity among those student populations are a valuable means of support.

*Keywords:* mentoring, student connections, social connections, retention, predominately white institution, Christian university

## **Dedication**

This dissertation journey is dedicated to my wife and children who provided great support to me in my educational pursuits. Specifically, to Sonia for the countless hours of proof reading and encouragement she provided to me. To my children, Nick, Hannah, and Josh for the understanding of my time away from them and the hope that they find that with hard work and dedication nearly nothing is impossible.

## **Acknowledgements**

Educational goals are rarely met solely through the efforts of one individual. Thus, I would like to acknowledge and thank those who assisted me in this dissertation journey. I first want to thank my institution and mentors for their support, feedback, and validation. I appreciate committee members Dr. Michael Self and Dr. Floralba A. Marrero who questioned me and pushed to make this research relevant. Their input in all parts of this project has been invaluable. Lastly, thank you Dr. James Therrell who was a great support as dissertation chair to me in this process. Your timely and meaningful emails, phone calls, and texts were enlightening and filled with encouragement.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Tables.....	xi
List of Figures.....	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Introduction to the Problem.....	2
Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Question.....	4
Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study.....	5
Researcher as Instrument.....	6
Researcher's Position.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
PWI.....	7
Christian college and university.....	7
Mentoring.....	8
Mentor.....	8
Mentee.....	8
Professional mentor.....	8
Social connections.....	8



Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations.....	8
Summary.....	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	12
Introduction.....	12
Context.....	12
Rationale.....	13
Problem statement.....	13
Conceptual Framework.....	14
Review of Research Literature and Methodical Literature.....	16
Peer Support and Mentoring.....	18
Faculty Mentoring of Students.....	19
Needs of Mentorship Programs.....	22
Ways for Colleges to Bolster Success for Minority Retention.....	24
Conclusion.....	28
Review of Methodological Issues.....	29
Synthesis of Research Findings.....	32
Critique of Previous Research.....	35
Conclusion.....	37
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	38
Introduction.....	38
Research Question.....	38
Purpose and Design of the Study.....	39
Research Population and Sampling Method.....	40

Instrumentation.....	42
Data Collection and Procedures.....	43
Interviews.....	44
Procedures.....	44
Focus Group.....	45
Procedures.....	46
Key Documents.....	47
Procedures.....	47
Data Analysis and Procedures.....	48
Limitations and Delimitation of the Research Designs.....	50
Validation.....	51
Credibility.....	52
Dependability.....	52
Transferability.....	53
Expected Findings.....	53
Ethical Issues.....	54
Conflict of Interest Assessment.....	54
Other Ethical Issues.....	54
Summary.....	57
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results.....	58
Introduction.....	58
Description of the Sample.....	60
Research Methodology and Analysis.....	62

Methodological Approach.....	62
Coding Approach.....	64
Key Document review approach.....	65
Summary of the findings.....	66
Major Theme 1.....	66
Major Theme 2.....	67
Major Theme 3.....	67
Presentation of the Data and Results.....	68
Major Theme 1.....	70
Subtheme 1A.....	70
Subtheme 1B.....	76
Subtheme 1C.....	79
Conclusion.....	81
Major Theme 2.....	82
Subtheme 2A.....	82
Subtheme 2B.....	85
Subtheme 2C.....	86
Conclusion.....	88
Major Theme 3.....	88
Subtheme 3A.....	89
Subtheme 3B.....	91
Subtheme 3C.....	93
Conclusion.....	94

Mentoring Socialization Flow.....	95
Summary.....	97
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion.....	99
Introduction.....	99
Summary of the Results.....	99
Discussion of the Results.....	102
Major Theme 1.....	104
Subtheme 1A.....	104
Subtheme 1B.....	105
Subtheme 1C.....	105
Major Theme 2.....	106
Subtheme 2A.....	106
Subtheme 2B.....	107
Subtheme 2C.....	107
Major Theme 3.....	108
Subtheme 3A.....	108
Subtheme 3B.....	108
Subtheme 3C.....	109
Interconnection of the Themes.....	109
Discussion of the Results: Conclusion.....	112
Discussion of the Results in the Relations to the Literature.....	114
Connection of the Major Findings to the Literature .....	115
Major Theme 1.....	115

Major Theme 2.....	116
Major Theme 3.....	116
Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory.....	116
Practice.....	117
Policy.....	120
Theory.....	122
Recommendations for Further research.....	124
Conclusion.....	125
References.....	127
Appendix A: List of Interview Questions for Students.....	140
Appendix B: List of Focus Group Questions for Mentors.....	141
Appendix C: List of Focus Group Questions for Students.....	143
Appendix D: Recruitment Email to Prospective Student.....	144
Appendix E: Recruitment Email to Prospective Mentors.....	145
Appendix F: Consent Form (mentor).....	146
Appendix G: Consent Form (student).....	148
Appendix H: List of Major and Subthemes.....	150
Appendix I: Statement of Original Work.....	151

## List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Student Participant Demographics</i> .....	61
Table 2. <i>Mentor Participant Demographics</i> .....	62
Table 3. <i>Major Theme Identification with Short Description</i> .....	66
Table 4. <i>Subthemes from Major Theme 1 (Relationships) with Descriptions</i> .....	69
Table 5. <i>Subthemes from Major Theme 2 (Overcoming Isolation) with Descriptions</i> .....	69
Table 6. <i>Subthemes from Major Theme 1 with Descriptions</i> .....	70

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. <i>Graphical image of this study's conceptual framework</i> .....	16
Figure 2. <i>Graphical view of the interconnection of the mentoring socialization flow</i> .....	97

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Changing demographics and institutional values have challenged the diversity goals of Christian educational institutions. As the number of traditional-aged minority students attending college increases (Beard, 2016), Christian institutions who have historically been predominantly white institutions (PWI) seek to serve this growing student population. As these colleges serve relatively small numbers, the students often are retained at lower rates and are more socially disconnected than their peers at public institutions. Faith-based colleges have students of varying ethnicities desiring to attend (Cannon & Morton, 2015). However, student services at colleges have not been able to always meet the needs of these students, resulting in poor student experiences, lack of engagement, and poor retention of the minority student population (Parker, Puig, Johnson, & Anthony, 2016).

In order to grow the minority populations, college leaders have started to make significant recruitment efforts of these students. Although many college leaders have made great strides, many have not (Berkhalter, 2018). The motivations of increasing diversity are many and include the fulfillment of mission (Pérez, 2013). Although some university officials have reported that some individuals fear that changing the demographics at the college will impact the core mission, others have clearly stated that a Christian college is not living its mission if it is not reaching all students (Pérez, 2013). Often the Great Commission from the 28th chapter of the book of Matthew serves as the basis of this argument: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19 ESV). Others point to the fact that Christian faith is an important part of many minority students’ lives, and joining a faith community such as this is much desired (Ramirez, Ashley, & Cort, 2014).



## **Introduction to the Problem**

Finding effective measures to help minority students, specifically African American students, feel more socially connected serves as the basis for the problem of this study. Minority students attending PWIs face the normal transitional issues that any student might encounter, but they also encounter isolation to which their minority status may contribute. As is common for many students as they transition into college, African American students might encounter academic difficulty, which may appear to be due to a lack of academic preparation. Typically, university officials intervene with additional academic support, but do not address other possible issues, such as the lack of social connectedness often felt by African American students at a PWI university (Tinto, 2017).

College leaders who desire to grow their minority populations must effectively create strategies to support students once they are on campus. Sometimes the offerings at a college will have many disconnected programs that are not working together and therefore, lack success (Pérez, 2013). In searching for solutions, programs that will both support the student holistically and diminish gaps in the students plan for success the role of mentor is identified as a potential option (Dahlvig, 2010).

## **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Often, the student population of Christian universities lack diversity, as does the one in this particular study. At this university, fewer than 6% of the traditional undergraduate students are African American. Student population tends to match the ethnicity of the churches that founded the institution (Harper, 2013), which is consistent in this study as well. Additionally, colleges of this nature may have started as a single gender college with a narrow curricular focus, such as preparing students for the ministry (Harper, 2013). Over time the curriculum of colleges

evolve to offer a wider variety of majors, to include both genders and various ethnicities, and to enroll students from a variety of religious backgrounds.

Anchoring this study is Boyer's six principles of communities (Boyer, 1990), a conceptual framework that guides the growth of student socialization. Boyer's theory states that a thriving university culture encompasses six communities: purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative (Boyer, 1990). Through this lens, the evaluation of the impact of improving social connections of African American students through a professional mentoring program is viewed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Midwestern, suburban, and historically White Christian college and university leaders have often struggled to enroll a diverse, traditional undergraduate student population (Dahlvig, 2010). A significant barrier to student success appears to be a lack of social connections in the lives of minority students, and specifically African American students (Dahlvig, 2010). In addition, african american students often face race related stressors that their white counterparts do not (Griffith, Hurd, & Hussain, 2019). Programs that include one-on-one professional staff mentoring can be a way to bolster a student's social connection (Benishek, Bieschke, Park, & Slattery, 2004).

Christian PWI university leaders are faced with the need to become more diverse, which stems from both mission-based decisions as well as enrollment realities. As previously identified, Christian university leaders view diversification as an important goal, born from Biblical principles such as the Great Commission as well as from a desire to reflect the community they serve (Pérez, 2013). As a practical matter, there are more African American students attending college than ever before and many in this growing population value a

university's core faith doctrine as an important factor when choosing a college to attend. As these institutions' traditional populations diminish, just like the size of their church bodies, changes need to occur to support viability of the institution (Cross & Slater, 2004).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Because the problem this study investigates is how to increase the social connections that African American students have with their Christian PWI university, the purpose of this study becomes an exploration of a single factor or treatment; although other factors and treatments exist that are not part of this study to improve social connections. The purpose of this study is to investigate student gains from a professional mentoring relationship in terms of connection socially to their campus. The results of this study should lead to an increased promotion of such programs in universities both similar to the one in this study as well as other PWI universities. In addition, this study aims to help provide insight that will enhance existing programs, with the goal to improve social connectedness between institutions and its minority students with the designed effect of great student success.

### **Research Question**

The results of this study further explain how the role of the mentor can increase an African American student's social connection to a PWI. Specifically, the researcher's question allows for participants to voice their experience in answering:

RQ1: How does professional mentoring impact an African American student's social connections at a Christian PWI?

The multifaceted responses to this question includes analyses of in-depth interviews where students describes their personal experiences within the university mentoring program. Common themes that help to answer the research question will also lead to further implications regarding

how to increase the impact of mentoring programs. In addition to themes that came from the data, the interconnection of the themes and how they flow to encourage or not encourage social connections is identified.

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

The importance of this study exists at many levels; the single case studied the improvement of a single program, as well as adding to the body of literature on the general topic of African American mentoring programs. There is significant literature on mentoring of minority students at large colleges (Hu & Ma, 2010; Sato, Eckert, & Turner, 2018), small colleges (Estepp, Velasco, Culbertson, & Conner, 2017), single gender programs (Haywood, Lee, & Sewell, 2016), mentoring of minority faculty at PWI (Zambrana et al., 2015), and even at HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Thompson-Rogers, Davis, Davis-Maye, & Turner, 2018). However, there is not an overwhelming amount of study involving mentoring programs of minority students at distinctively Christian PWIs. The Dahlvig (2010) study lays the groundwork that this study builds upon and serves as significant previous literature from which to draw.

The study also brings significance to the topic of social connections in the conversation of African American student success at a PWI Christian university. Often, items that are easier to be tracked like retention or even items such as student engagement serve as the reference point in similar studies. However, a student's social connection with the institution is another critical factor for success (Tinto, 2017). Increasing student connection to the college, moving from the feeling of an outsider to an insider or "their college" to "my college" mentality, is a critical first step that can successfully lead to other outcomes such as increased engagement and retention

(Tinto, 2017). The students' social connections need to be addressed and improved early in the student tenure at the university, well before they have made the decision to leave the college.

### **Researcher as Instrument**

This qualitative single case study depended on the researcher as an instrument of data collection. In this case, the main method of collection was interviews and focus groups. Given the nature of the study, the interviewer and researcher play a significant role in the data collection. Ensuring proper procedure and strategy in the development of the research plan and in the facilitation of the interviews is critical, with only four student interviews being conducted, to ensure a study with quality and meaningful results.

A researcher can improve the quality of the interviews by ensuring proper interview strategy. Gay and Airasian (2000) describe eight items that increase the effectiveness of interviews. These include: listen more and talk less, follow up on anything that is not clearly understood, use open-ended questions, and do not interrupt the interviewee. In addition, the interviewer should keep the participant's focus, follow-up with concrete details, allow for silence and wait period, refrain from judging answers, and finally, do not debate over responses. Following these strategies will improve the interview and reduce bias from the researcher.

### **Researcher's Position**

The theoretical beliefs of the researcher regarding this topic are developed from professional experience. This includes nearly 20 years of working in a college and seeing first-hand various levels of success from minority students at a Christian PWI. The topic has meaning to me given my long-term employment at a Christian PWI university where the diversity of the student body has been minimal. As a student affairs professional, I have made it my career to

improve the student experience of all students. Student success is one of my great rewards of my job.

The researcher's intention of this study was to review the use of mentoring as a means to improve overall success by strengthening student social connections to and within the college. Students that have thrived in the past are ones that appear to have been connected to their college through both formal and informal mentoring programs or any linkage activity like the one Tinto (2017) suggests. These are students who have made social connections and feel socially acclimated within the university, which has allowed the student to feel less like an outsider and more of an insider (Tinto, 2017). Given these experiences, it is my belief that universities can be places of thriving student diversity that continue to uphold the founding missional focus.

### **Definition of Terms**

Given the specific nature of the study, the following terms are identified and explained for greater contextual understanding. These terms are used regularly in all parts of this study, both from other literature as well as in the data review chapters of this manuscript:

**Predominantly White Institution (PWI).** This refers to colleges that have a low percentage of minority students. By definition, a college is a PWI if the ratio of white students is greater than 50% (Sinana, 2016). However, in many cases the minority percentage of students can be much lower (Sinana, 2016).

**Christian college and/or university.** Institution of higher education that identifies as being aligned with or aligning values with a particular Christian denomination or general Christian belief (Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016).

**Mentoring.** A relationship between at least two parties where one party is more experienced and offers personal insight to support and advise the less experienced party. Often activities in mentoring include training and advice (Gershenfeld, 2014).

**Mentor.** A person who has greater knowledge or experiences that guide and support another less knowledgeable person based on that knowledge base (Gershenfeld, 2014).

**Mentee.** A person who receives knowledge, support, and guidance from a person, often referred to as a mentor, who has more knowledge and experience (Gershenfeld, 2014).

**Professional mentor.** A mentor who is a professional full-time employee of the university (Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009).

**Social connections.** The level of association a student makes to a college, including coming together with others and interacting both in numbers as well as in quality. This includes faculty and staff, university administrators, and peers. Tinto (2017) describes one feeling like an insider versus an outsider.

### **Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations**

Delimitations, assumptions, and limitations are all items that need to be identified in a research study to provide the most ethical and transparent research as possible. No study is able to provide research without understanding delimitations and acknowledging assumptions, research is unable to completely answer a question in all ways and in all places. Delimitations are the criteria and methodological decisions made about the study to focus or limit the study (Creswell, 2014). Assumptions are what Creswell (2014) describes as the researchers preconceived outcomes of both the research collection as well the general research results. Limitations are what Creswell (2014) describes as the constraints that a study has based on the

criteria and question being explored (Creswell, 1994). Being able to clearly identify each improves the researcher's ability to identify the scope of what the research is covering.

In this case study, the research is being delimited by both the race of the students selected to be part of the study, mentoring program participation within a specific period of time, and the setting of the study. In order to participate in this study, the mentee must have identified him or herself as African American, as well as participated in the mentoring program for at least one semester within two years of the data collection. In addition, the setting is a single Christian PWI university in the Midwest. These research criteria set the boundaries of the study. These delimitations are clearly stated and followed throughout the design and execution of the study. This clarity allows the reader to fully understand the scope of this research and take the impact of the study knowing the most amount of information.

Assumptions are ideas that the researcher has prior to beginning the research. These ideas often come from previous research and literature and life experiences the research might have had. It is assumed in this study the respondents would have reported that their connection with their mentor provided them skills to socially connect with the campus community. This might include self-confidence, an understanding how where and how to connect and whom to connect with. Although there is an assumption that each student that participates will reach a significantly high level of social connection, it is however thought that all would grow and be more connected than when they started there mentoring. It is also assumed that students will create a friendship with their mentor that is reciprocated and that both parties will state that they grew from the experience. The setting of a Christian PWI also causes the researcher to think the setting plays a role in how mentoring plays out. A faith based under pinning might influence greater success for students than at a public institution.



Limitations of this study are items that are outside the control of the researcher and considered weaknesses of the study. Although weaknesses can be considered a negative part of the study, all research has limitations and, just like delimitations, must be identified for the clarity of the study. Limitations to design, data collection, and data analyzation are often identifiable and must be considered throughout the research. The limitations of this study include the willingness of the students to provide meaningful interviews and the quality of focus groups. Limitations also emerge from the design itself, a case study at PWI Christian college that includes a small number of students in the study.

### **Summary**

A student's social connection, or how they feel connected towards their campus, has a significant impact on their overall success (Tinto, 2017). Minority students, in addition to all of the other challenges that being a freshman in college brings, also often face additional isolation (Dahlvig, 2010). This study aims to look at the impact of a single, but dynamic, intervention of mentoring to increase social connections. Through the experience of mentoring, African American students share their outcomes through focused private interviews, a single focus group, a mentor focus group and key documents.

Although the role of mentorship has many benefits and meaningful outcomes, the purpose of this study focuses on social connections. The findings very well might explore of these other mentor benefits impacts a student's social connections, non the less the focus stays with social connections. Social connection is one of many items that Tinto (2017) suggests as a factor of student success. Opposed to simply looking at retention or student grades, this study aims to explore some of the root effects of these student outcomes. Students who are connected socially are more likely to retain, have better grades, and enjoy their experience. College

administrators that are serious about truly becoming diverse need to address all of these issues and not just on the admissions end of the process. Getting the student to enroll is not enough and should not stop there, but continue throughout the student's enrollment.

This qualitative single case study, delimited to a single PWI Christian college in the Midwestern United States, explores the use of professional mentoring and how a Christian PWI can use such a program to improve social connections. Data coming from student interviews and both a mentor and mentee focus group along with key documents provide a look on the success of building social connections for African American students in and with the university.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Socialization of African American students at PWI Christian colleges can be challenging (Ecklund, 2013). Students who make meaningful connections and move from feeling like an outsider to an insider will typically be more engaged and successful during college (Tinto, 2017). These connections may be built from specific circumstances, including a strong mentoring relationship. A review of current literature and a focus on what is working at a particular campus could help to refine and improve the way African American students socially connect at a Christian PWI.

This study addresses the impact of what a mentor can do for an African American student attending a Christian PWI. Although we know that students attend colleges for many different reasons, African American students tend to be most successful when they feel socially connected (Small & MacDonald-Dennis, 2015). Along with improving social connections to the campus, sound mentoring will build up the student, which will increase the odds of their retention, graduation, and academic achievement.

### **Context**

This study takes place at a small Christian PWI college in the Midwest. Institutions such as this have historically not been diverse, which often makes it difficult for African American students to feel connected (Cannon & Morton, 2015). In addition, these colleges tend to lack a diverse faculty and staff, which is problematic for African American students because they tend to gravitate to African American faculty and staff as both formal and informal advisors. When small numbers of minority students coexist at a PWI, they can easily fall into the cracks.

## **Rationale**

The need for a PWI to become more diverse comes from many angles. For one, the college has missional needs of the Great Commission from the book of Matthew that states Christians should witness to all the people of the Earth. Many would consider this a call to diversity. Another practical reason to grow different populations is to meet enrollment goals. A PWI leadership team that wishes to stay true to its origins will find shrinking student populations that historically attended the college. For these reasons, university administrators must be intentional in creating ways to socially connect with their small African American populations (Haizlip, 2012).

## **Problem Statement**

The problem statement attempts to explore into the issues of African American students at PWI Christian colleges, looking at one area that may stimulate success. Simply, this study explores what impact a professional mentor has on selected African American students attending a Christian PWI. An important question is: How does this relationship affect the students in all areas of their college experience, which includes the social and academic elements of their experience? This question is answered by interviewing students who were part of a program of mentoring with a strong track record of academic success.

The relevant literature in this chapter dives into the topic of African American students and the role of mentoring in their overall higher education success. This review includes the following topics: peer support, faculty mentoring, needs of the mentoring programs, and ways to improve mentoring programs. Peer support and mentoring include the use of peer students as a mentor, and informal supporting agents affect student success. The use of faculty and staff pairing up with students in both highly structured programs, as well as inform ways is a common used method that is explored often. Research regarding limitations of mentoring programs

provided insight into what makes a successful mentoring program. Primarily these indicators included successful training of the mentors and sound program infrastructure that proved clear goals and objectives. Lastly, the topic of ways to improve mentoring programs, including those targeting African American faculty, serve as an important piece in how to best serve students. African American Faculty can be some of the best mentors; however, their needs, that include mentorship for themselves, often is much needed especially at PWI Christian Universities.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Christian college administrations that adhere to traditional Christian beliefs follow the Great Commission. This directive from the book of Matthew urges outreach to broaden the base of believers. University leaders searching for this broader base of students will, among other things, focus on retention. Tinto's (2017) model of retention requires a student connection that includes socialization. Boyer's (1990) theory, entitled *In Search of Community* outlines six significant parts of a college community that include purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. Successful communities thrive in all six of the identified areas. Socialization theory, along with a focus on Boyer's (1990) theory of communities, serves as the theoretical framework that guides this study.

Completion of the Great Commission implies the recruitment and retention of as many souls as the organization can achieve. Matthew 18 records the words of Jesus as he directs disciples to go into the entire world, find the lost, and make more disciples. In order to fulfill this directive on a college campus, different populations, beyond what the university faculty has historically served, must be reached and retained. Predominantly White institutions have not had a significant, positive, or successful record of accomplishment regarding diverse student populations (Berkhalter, 2018; Gusa, 2010).

Socialization theory has many different perspectives, but for this study the focus of moving students from outsiders to insiders and then embracing the college as theirs is the theoretical focus of this study of reviewing the impact of mentoring by professional staff and faculty of African American students at a PWI small Christian College (Bullis & Bach, 1989). Weideman (2001) further describes this as making a fit with the organization. This type of fit also includes how the individual connects with the organization's ethos (Dunn et al., 1994). Around the shared beliefs of Christianity, like those of many religious-based universities, a wide connection point is available for the student to latch onto.

Boyer's (1990) socialization theory is used due to its relevance for the focus of this study, the impacts of mentoring on the social connection of African American students. Boyer defines a campus community as one that embraces six different characteristics: purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. This theory builds on socialization theory by adding characteristics to what a campus can strive for in working towards the socialization of its own students. Tinto (2017) adds to this in his work regarding the needs of a student to have a sense of belonging in the college. In his model of retention, social integration along with an institutional leader's commitment to student success, serve in a significant way to determine positive outcomes (Tinto, 2017). Tinto's (2017) work adds to the need of socialization that leads to a greater feeling student connectedness.

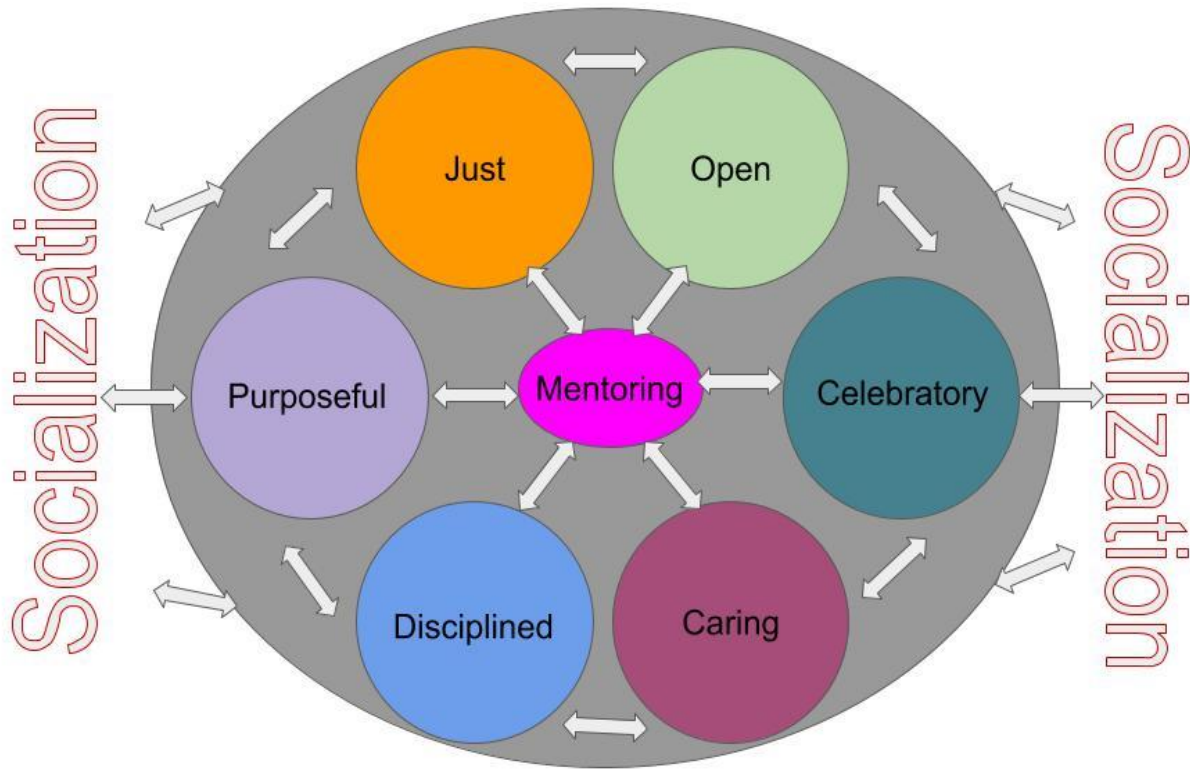


Figure 1. Graphical image of this study's conceptual framework.

Mentoring addresses and supports each of the six communities of Boyer's (1990) *In Search of Community*. The result is greater socialization of students in their university community. Figure 1 visually shows how the mentor processes address the six communities providing a wholistic approach to improving the student's socialization.

### **Review of Research Literature and Methodical Literature**

Retention of minority students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), including private Christian colleges and universities, has been deemed difficult yet important as the number of African American students at these institutions is growing (Cross & Slater, 2004). Fortunately, retention strategies for the success of these students have been studied in depth (Tinto, 2017). Retention is helped when a student realizes academic success; therefore, students that are more socially connected and feel like an insider are more successful academically (Reid,

2013). These strategies include well-designed programs of mentoring and other engagement strategies for African American Students. Although social connections of African American students are a focus at Christian colleges, this issue is also present at PWI public colleges as well.

Students need a way to feel connected on campus. Christian colleges, although historically not diverse, have African American students who often hold a common ground with other students, faculty, and administrators in their value of faith. Dancy (2010) describes this in a study of 24 African American male students that viewed their faith as a significant part of their life. This is supported by Ramirez et al. (2014) who also found that faith was significant to the student. This shared value in faith certainly could be a connecting point of African American students and Christian colleges (Cannon & Morton, 2015). Although African American students might be a minority population, they often want to find a connection to campus; a shared value is a way to connect (Haywood, Jerry, & Sewell, 2016).

Minority students also face key barriers. While often unintended, PWI Christian college communities can come across as unfriendly and even hostile to students of color (Rutherford, 2011; Harper, 2013). This may include everything from the campus culture and traditions to academic programs (McGovney-Ingram, Larke, & Rutherford, 2011). Bridging this perceived hostility is a challenge that many students of color may choose not to attempt and instead choose not to matriculate, simply leaving the college community in frustration.

Finding a relevant connection to the college may be assisted through the process of mentoring. Mentoring appears to be an excellent way to increase engagement and make the needed connection for the student (McGovney-Ingram, et al., 2011). Reflecting back to Tinto's



(2017) work on connections, the idea of a student moving from an outsider to an insider ultimately serve as the goal of successful mentoring to create connections.

University leaders may easily lose sight of a student's perception of the race connection to the campus. African American students can come from different backgrounds than their white classmates. For instance, in 2012 it was reported that 2.7 million African American students were being raised by a grandparent. This generational gap appears to be much greater in the African American community (Whitley, 2018). Well-meaning Christian PWI college leaders may not fully appreciate how students feel on this topic (Drape, Anderson, Church, Jain, Slabach, & Amaral, 2017). African American males in particular report feeling their campus is not safe and that they do not belong there (Parker et al., 2016). Such a disconnection may cause real problems to the campus and their minority student population, thus precipitating low retention numbers. African American students often must combat many more racial and socio-emotional challenges or obstacles than their white counterparts (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

### **Peer Support and Mentoring**

Typically, college leaders search for ways to retain minority students. Although not exactly a peer mentoring program, college initiatives have found retention successes in the use of ethnic-based clubs. In Bowman, Park, and Denson's (2015) 10-year longitudinal study, they discovered that students participating in ethnic clubs achieved a greater success because the club offered a way for students to relate to other students that were similar to themselves. To this end, they pointed out that the need for proficient minority advisors was significant to the club's success (Bowman et al., 2015). Minority advisors, along with their organizational leadership, provided a role model to many in the group. Bowman et al. (2015) indicate how the advisers increase positive outcomes of the ethnic clubs.

Just creating a title of mentor and matching up two people will not organically create a highly successful mentoring program. Watt (2006) looked at the effects of peer mentoring of African American students at a large public PWI and found the results not to be that significant; however, the research did indicate that success is correlated with the quality of the program. Matching up two students and calling it mentoring will not automatically bring success. This is true for multiple minority groups including Native American students (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007). Peer mentoring programs that became successful were completed in the best way possible (Watt, 2006). These factors include institutional resources, program leadership, defined outcomes, and significant training to accomplish the desired outcome.

The use of a peer in the mentor process can warrant desirable outcomes and increase students' social connections. Mangold (2002) was able to clearly demonstrate that peer mentoring is a successful tool for creating social connections when done well. These connections can often be the base of success for a student that can help improve retention. Dennis, Phinney, and Lizette's (2005) work examined first generation students and reported that peer support was incredibly important to students' socialization success. The positive effects of the peer mentoring often go beyond the person being mentored. By using peer mentoring, the mentor can benefit from greater social connection just as the mentee (Oaks, Duckett, Suddeth, & Kennedy-Philips, 2013).

### **Faculty Mentoring of Students**

Mentoring has long been identified as a way to increase student success. Campbell and Campbell's (2007) longitudinal study of students in a mentoring program found GPA was only slightly higher for students in the mentoring program. Although that might be a finding that contradicts the positive outcome of mentoring, the study also found that students in the

mentoring program took more credits and graduated faster (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). Other mentor programs have resulted in meeting persistence goals. Hu and Ma (2010) conducted a large-scale study where 452 students were included. Students were part of a state scholarship program that included a mentoring component. Sato et al. (2018) examined how academic mentoring of African American student athletes at a large University showed growth both in academic success but also in personal development. The data demonstrated how a large-scale program including many students can provide success with appropriate planning and training (Hu & Ma, 2010; Sato et al., 2018).

Since mentors of the same race are found to be more effective, they should be chosen with care. Dalvig (2010) examined the role of the mentor for the student and found that minority students gravitated to minority mentors. Dalvig's (2010) study found that students felt a quicker and closer connection to mentors of their own race. Students stated they did not need to tell their story and have to explain how they felt, but rather the mentor could understand.

Other minority groups, including students of Hispanic descent, also have demonstrated great success from mentoring (Estepp et al., 2017). This study demonstrated the outcomes involving Hispanic students, but also included the fact that a program must provide training and be well designed to optimize success (Estepp et al., 2017). Shotton et al. (2007) demonstrate success in a peer mentoring program providing assistance to Native American students who were provided high quality peer mentoring.

Another minority group requiring focus are African American student athletes. These students have been found not to retain as well as their non-athlete peers. This population in particular needs to find a connection to campus outside of their given sport (Cooper, 2016).

Mentoring is one of many ways that assists these students that need support from all areas of campus, not just the coach and athletic department (Cooper, 2016).

Mentoring programs often may be the help needed to get students over any barriers to academic success. Marygrove College in Detroit offered a program to nontraditional-aged African American men to pursue a teacher education degree (Okezie, 2018). In this limited study of a small number of students at one college, a greater success rate of graduation and placement as teachers were found by men that participated in this program than those who did not (Okezie, 2018). African American men have been found to benefit greatly from mentoring (Butler, Evans, Brooks, Williams, & Bailey, 2013). Condon et al. (2013) found similar results in a specific support program including mentoring for minority students in a nursing program. Localizing efforts by a small subgroup has found great success in these single academic program-based efforts (Condon et al., 2013).

Although the above studies focused on men, Stayhorn and Saddler (2009) found that success was not tied to gender. This study focused on African American students in mentoring programs and found that the outcome was the same, regardless of gender. Mentoring also increased student satisfaction and engagement. Following socialization theory, students went from feeling like an outsider to an insider. The mentoring by a faculty member may often times be the most effective person on campus in that role (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Faculty mentoring served as a bridge to this success in one study (Stayhorn & Saddler, 2009).

Addressing the issue of underrepresented populations in higher education is not limited to just traditional undergraduate programs. Effective mentoring has also been successful in graduate programs (Haizlip, 2012). In certain contexts, the racial inequality in graduate

programs is even greater than in undergraduate programs. Effective mentoring by faculty can help serve these students with a higher outcome of success as well (Haizlip, 2012).

### **Needs of Mentorship Programs**

Although most mentoring programs appear to be only for at risk students, high achieving African American students can benefit as well (Freeman, 1999). Often times, students who enter a college with previous high achievement are thought to be ready to succeed; however, transitions to college especially that of an African American at a PWI may be a significant challenge (Freeman, 1999). Quality programs focused on broad success should not abandon this population, even though this group of students might be less likely to volunteer to be part of such a program, and who might have a negative opinion of such a program from the onset (Freeman, 1999).

A strategy like mentorship will not likely be a magic bullet to fix all student socialization issues. In 2016, Ash and Schreiner published a study where the effects of mentoring were reviewed, but also an additional 11 other factors were identified as success strategies for African American students attending Christian PWIs. Students in the study who met all 12 factors were most likely to succeed; mentoring was included as one of the 12 (Ash & Schreiner, 2016), though no priority was ascribed to particular factors. Students who met fewer of the 12 factors were less likely to be successful. However, Ash and Schreiner did not identify which of the factors appears to be more or less significant in student success. Programs that focused on retention as the end result appear to have worked on this topic, as well as increasing GPAs of targeted students (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2012).

Successful mentoring cannot only focus on academics or on a student socialization at the university, rather both need to be the focus equally (Benishek et al., 2004). African American

students might face needs that include both and a mentor should provide support on both fronts. Often success is determined on graduation, retention, GPA standards, making these measurements not significant. However, the need to build a base of socialization for the student in order to be successful is less measurable in the way these academics are, but are no less significant.

Mentoring programs can also have a very focused population attempting to address a subscribed set of minority students. Thompson-Rogers et al. (2018) studied mentoring as a way to grow diversity in the medical profession. White et al., (2018) also took a narrow focus with research that centered around the discipline of engineering education. Not unlike PWIs, these studies identify that the medical profession and engineering academic programs are both limited in diversity and have poor persistence of its students and professionals (Thompson-Rogers et al., 2018; White et al., 2018). The strategy from the Thompson-Rogers et al. (2018) study employed both professional and peer mentoring as a strategy to both promote recruitment and academic success of minority medical career candidates. The study identified the need for training of the mentors and the importance of the relationship of the mentor and mentee (Thompson-Rogers et al., 2018). White et al. (2018) suggests the use of summer bridge programs that provide additional support prior to the start of the program which include mentoring as a potential successful resource to minority engineering students.

A poorly operated mentoring program might yield very little in the way of positive outcomes. Mentoring programs must be of quality and undergo proficient training in order to be effective (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). Brittian, Sy, and Stokes (2009) add to this discussion in their findings that a poorly executed mentoring program might have very little if any positive outcome on students in the program. Mentors need training and the program needs to be of the

highest quality to bring high-end results (Estepp et al., 2017). In addition to training, the program needs to cultivate strong mentoring relationships between all parties (Thompson-Rogers et al., 2018). If not done well, even if the mentors are minority faculty, efforts to impact students will fail or at best not meet their full potential (Nora & Crisp, 2007).

### **Ways for Colleges to Bolster Success for Minority Retention**

Institutional leadership desire for positive outcomes that include action for improvement is one of the most significant factors for a college's success. Arguably, the most significant way to increase persistence of African American students at Christian PWI colleges is for the university leadership to seriously desire improvement (Paredes-Collins, 2009; Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016). A college's leadership team's legitimate commitment to improve these conditions will bolster any retention results. Institutional leaders in this category may make progress, but most likely will need to make it an institutional priority that supports initiatives like mentoring programs and/or increasing diversity in the faculty and staff ranks (Paredes-Collins, 2009).

The single most significant factor that forecasted successful increased social connections of African American students was whether or not leadership at the college identified this as an institutional priority (Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014). In this 2014 study, PWI and historically black colleges and universities were studied. In both sets of data, institutional desire, along with resources and effort, appeared to be the most significant indicator of success. University leaders that wanted to improve African American social connections and retention did so (Chen et al., 2014).

Berkhalter (2018) further supported this connection between college leader's intent and the success what was gained in terms of diversity on campus. The study found strong

connections to success of diversity when administrators link university mission and values to the efforts of diversity, having leaders play strong active roles in the change process and having change leadership in diversity champions (Berkhalter, 2018). This qualitative study that used a population of two PWI Christian colleges help provide recommendations to presidents committed to diversity. This includes linking efforts to mission and vision, creating outlets to uphold diversity and to introduce change slowly (Berkhalter, 2018).

African American students at PWI colleges tend to feel a lack of connection to their college whether through academic programs, faculty, or staff. Often environmental factors of the PWI institution contributed greatly to this lack of connection (White, Alexander, Prince, & Verdell, 2018). The work of Waller, Costern, and Wozencraft (2011) illustrates the power of minority faculty to help these students connect. The racial similarity of the mentor appears to be a strong connection such that students relate to and find a natural connection in the mentor-mentee relationship. This work highlights the need for PWI college administrators to diversify their faculty (Waller et al., 2011; Zambrana et al., 2015). This African American to African American relationship can help break down the white culture for the student (Madyun, Williams, McGee, & Milner, 2013). Smith and Mamiseishvili (2016) also support the power of connection that the minority mentor has with the student. Even in colleges that do not have official mentoring programs, this connection of African American students to African American faculty will occur. Students tend to seek out these relationships for improve their own connection to campus (Sinanan, 2016).

This lack of connection to the college can also be a result of race-related stressors that the student experiences (Griffith et al., 2019). African American students, in addition to the normal college transition stressors, have additional sources of stress based on race. A significant result



of this can include a strong sense of self isolation from the institutional culture (Griffith et al., 2019). Often school official at PWI colleges are not aware of the level of stressors that exist at the college for minority students. These factors can result from the college's long PWI history and the fact that many PWI christen colleges have large residential populations where the student is effect both academically and socially (Griffith et al., 2019). One of the identified coping methods in this study includes the use of mentors that students can talk to, however this study is clear to identif that the mentors are minority as well (Griffith et al., 2019).

The need for African American faculty has never been greater as the number of African American students are on the rise. Although this number has been on the rise, the number of African American faculty has not kept up at the same rate (Beard, 2016). This gives cause for college leaders to give extra attention to their minority faculty. Mentoring of these junior faculty by senior faculty may be even more important at a Christian college than just a PWI (Lund, 2007). Christian college leaders often have additional themes to explore such as faith connections to the curriculum and how this connects to the political ethos of the campus. Mentoring can be a key strategy to help faculty feel less like an outsider and more like an insider (Bullis & Bach, 1989).

Mentoring of minority faculty is an effective way to bolster their success as well. Understanding that minority faculty mentors might be the most effective mentors to students and even that their presence on campus can help engage African American students is a key (Brinson & Kottler, 1993). However, these new faculty to campus are not unlike students and need mentoring of their own (Lechuga, 2014). Brinson and Kottler (1993) describe how minority faculty at PWIs who have mentors are more likely to stay employed at their institution. These

diverse faculty may then serve as powerful mentors to help engage a more diverse student population (Brinson & Kottler, 1993).

Although Christian PWI college administrators have traditionally struggled to obtain faculty of a diverse population, programs like mentoring of new faculty can serve as one of many strategies to increasing this significant asset to a campus (Absher, 2009). The need of minority faculty appears to be important to university leaders attempting to increase the number of minority students succeeding. Absher (2009) highlights the issues that confronts PWI Christian college administrators in the recruitment and retention of faculty. Absher (2009) describes the need to fill the essentials of these faculties, which might be different from other faculty already employed. An example was how female faculty tended to report a great need or desire for flexibility in their job. In this study, 102 Christian colleges were studied (Absher, 2009) and similar results were found leading universities to reexamine strategies to recruit and retain female faculty members.

Well-designed policies and programs should point to addressing concerns that often prevent minority faculty from joining the ranks of Christian PWIs. Not unlike general barriers that instructors face at any university, minority faculty might be at a great disadvantage not understanding a complicated political structure in an already political profession (Lechuga, 2014). University administration that really want to diversify must address flexibility desires that include how and when these faculties teach (Absher, 2009). Another great divide that is found across the academy is that women of color are paid less by a third to their white male counterparts (Zahneis, 2018). Progressive policies that might alter the normal way of doing business very well may help increase diversity among the college's instructors.

Gender may also play a role in how students connect to their given university. Like the power of the minority connection in mentoring, the same appears to hold true with gender (Casto, Caldwell, & Salazar, 2005). A female-to-female mentoring connection proved to also be a significant linking for students. Gender, like race, appears to be a natural connection point between the student and mentor (Casto et al., 2005).

Although previous research supports the positive effect African American mentors have on mentoring African American students, white faculty may also have positive effects (Gordon, 2007). Cross-ethnic mentoring is most effective when the mentor is sincere, authentic, and empathetic. Attempts to mentor African American students should still be done even if there is a lack of African American mentors (Gordon, 2007). Efforts of mentoring African American students should not be abandoned because of a lack of diverse mentors, success can be found; however, it might take more time and not be in the end as successful.

## **Conclusion**

The literature in this section captures several themes about the socialization of African American students that include the topics of peer mentoring, faculty mentoring, same race and gender mentoring, as well as the importance of African American faculty. Peer mentoring allows student upon student reflection to help assist socialization. This method has also been shown to benefit the mentor greatly (Ward, Thomas, & Disch, 2014). Mentoring from faculty created success in many ways. Even when the success was not in GPA, mentored students completed more credits per semester (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). An important finding is the significance of African American faculty mentoring African American students; mentees reported a natural connection that helped to foster the relationship (Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016). Lastly, PWI Christian college and university leaders may increase their recruitment and

retention of African American faculty through mentoring by senior faculty. Programs such as this assist in helping new faculty to both navigate the college community as well as increase their own socialization (Lund, 2007).

Although much has been written about the impacts of mentoring African American students, Gershenfeld (2014) points out that there is much more to be done. Further exploration on the topic will yield outcomes that will improve how college leaders use various tools to increase student social connection and overall success (Gershenfeld, 2014). Even with the efforts already in place, African American students still cite a lack of connection to their campus as well as not feeling safe (Parker et al., 2016). Efforts like mentoring in its many forms may be a way to increase African American student socialization at PWI Christian colleges and universities.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

The purpose of this section is to critically review the current literature and closely related ones based on the chosen methodology (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The critical review serves as the basis to set the context of future studies. Throughout the process of reviewing studies in the relevant literature about African American college student mentoring, several different research designs and methods were used to collect and analyze data with varying findings and conclusions. These studies were conducted at small Christian PWI colleges, large PWI public universities, as well as HBCUs (Chen et al., 2014). Findings from these previous studies are critical to the reflection process needed to build future methodological plans, which in key cases includes evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of previous research in order to strengthen the design, methods, and procedures of this study.

Often, the size of the campus dictated the type of research that was conducted. The content of these studies included socialization issues as well as connection to faith in all types of colleges. For example, the number of African American students was often small and a qualitative study was typically used. In these studies (e.g., Dahlvig, 2010), as few as five different students were interviewed. The results, despite limited sources, appeared to have depth, transferability and validity through the use of data triangulation and rich, thick description.

When focusing on studies with small populations (Dahlvig, 2010; McGovney-Ingram, et al., 2011; Okezie, 2018; Shotton et al., 2007; Ward et al., 2014; Ware & Ramos, 2013), certain concerns arise about the protection of the participants. At small PWI Christian institutions, the sample sizes of African American students were relatively small, ranging from five to 20 participants, and most studies as noted were conducted in a qualitative fashion such as Dahlvig (2010). With a small subject pool, confidentiality may be problematic and challenging to maintain. Descriptions of a particular office in either a positive or a negative light might also compromise an individual's confidentiality who works in that given office.

Quantitative studies, often popular in larger settings, provide a much larger base of data. In some cases, as many as over 400 students participated (Guillory, 2009; Hu & Ma, 2010). Other large data collection methods included surveys as well as data mining of students on questions as simple as whether they were part of a mentoring program and then inquiring about outcomes (Ramirez et al., 2014). In a few cases, the outcome did not show the expected GPA increase; however, the study did indicate students earned a greater number of credits (Brittian et al., 2009; Campbell & Campbell, 2007). Larger studies do give access to many more points of contacts or data points; however, you are limited to the depth of the information each can give (Guillory, 2009).

Quantitative studies with large numbers of participants afford broad, rather than in-depth, answers to the questions they ask. With large groups of responses, a great deal of privacy for the participants may be achieved (Ash & Schreiner, 2016). In addition, the large sample size provides a strong level of confidence in the statistical results. Such a study, however, lacks depth in answering the “why” questions that may lead to more meaningful educational implications. The limitations of the quantitative survey method are that it typically fails to reveal the deeper, more meaningful responses needed for educators, meaning we might know the result but might not be sure as to why, and therefore not sure of how to move forward.

Other research designs have key factors that include where the research is occurring and the setting of the study. Although a meaningful place to study the mentoring of African American students is in colleges that are PWIs, research also has used settings at HBCUs (Burrell, Fleming, Fredericks, & Moore, 2015). Other locations include colleges of all sizes, small private colleges to large public institutions, with each ranging from a largely Caucasian student body to more diverse campuses. In each study, the research design takes the setting into account in relation to what the specific setting has to offer in terms of the desired outcome which is often student engagement, satisfaction, or retention.

Other methodological items to review include who the research targeted, either a short-term or long-term study, and where faith played into the study. Research has focused both on the mentor (faculty) and mentee (student and faculty). In both cases, the objectives of the research tend to be about the quantitative correlation between mentoring and the success of either the student or faculty member. The methodology bases the results on the idea that an African American faculty member may provide greater impact to an African American student. Short-term studies limit the ability to demonstrate the long-term impact that mentoring might have on

students. Lastly, the connection of faith regarding African American students serves as a secondary point in this discussion. Instead, faith's importance and how it draws students to the Christian PWI should be demonstrated to be a significant factor in student college decision-making (Ramirez et al., 2014).

With each of the different major methodological issues, clear pros and cons appear within the respective approaches. The bulk of the relevant research has taken the form of qualitative or quantitative methodology. Qualitative allows for smaller samples, which benefits small campuses where few African American students are able to participate; however, smaller samples might allow for less anonymity. Quantitative studies may include large sample sizes, but limit the "why" answers. Targeted populations dictate from whom and how data is collected, as well as the selected college size and missional type. The variety of approaches creates a wide span for data collection and analysis.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

In order to fully understand what has been written, all of the pieces that are present must be put together. This process includes a synthesis of the relevant findings in previous research to outline the overarching connections. The research conducted in this literature review varied in relation to both the settings and methodologies used. For settings, research was conducted at colleges from large public universities with different types of student populations (Hu & Ma, 2010; Sato et al., 2018), from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Thompson-Rogers et al., 2018) to small religiously affiliated Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs; Paredes-Collins, 2009). Methodologies also vary from quantitative studies with a large number of participants (Ramirez et al., 2014) to qualitative studies with as few as five different subjects (Dahlvig, 2010). Participants included first year students

(Haywood & Sewell, 2016), graduate students (Waring & Bordoloi, 2012), and faculty (Zambrana et al., 2015). The common threads were the mentoring factors that lead to a greater likelihood of success for the mentee.

Although study locations were different, common themes linked study populations, namely minority students and faculty members. The location or type of college did not change the underlining issue of creating ways to improve success of the research participant. The issue under review generally targeted the outcome of how connected the participant was with the institution (Tinto, 2017). This central theme and outcome of connection generally served as the basis of the study, which typically explored the impact of mentoring upon this outcome.

Study outcomes also varied. The idea of social connection, or mostly the idea of moving from a social outsider to an insider, was repeated in the different studies (Casto et al., 2005). The specific participant outcomes ranged from general satisfaction, retention, increased attendance, and academic success. Most research tended to tie increased student engagement to outcomes of higher overall satisfaction, increased GPA, and improved retention rates (e.g., Tinto, 2017).

Although methodologies included qualitative, mixed, and quantitative, all generally focused on the outcome of mentoring on the minority student. Often, studies looked at similar concerns in different ways. For instance, a review of a quantitative survey found larger trends of GPA and if the student persisted (Waller, Costen, & Wozencraft, 2011). Qualitative studies focused on a smaller group and were able to reveal finer points and reasons for the outcomes of the mentoring program and how it affected the student holistically. These studies had relatively small sample sizes, like in the case of a study by McGovney-Ingram et al. (2011) where there were only nine participants.



Cumulatively, the results of most of data were positive about the effect of mentoring. Different studies found outcomes that may have been somewhat dictated by both the setting and the methodology. For instance, a study at a large public institution using a qualitative method was able to find an increased GPA (Brooks et al., 2013), while a qualitative study at a private college found that having a mentor who was also a minority typically benefited the mentor relationship and allowed the student to connect better with the college community (Oaks et al., 2013). In nearly all cases, a positive outcome was found, even when the finding showed that mentored students completed more credits than those that were non-mentored, even though this finding was not part of the initial question (Brittian et al., 2009).

An interesting connection to much of the data were based on the quality of the mentoring program. Many studies clearly stated, and in others it was implied, that a well-run program was likely related to the potential for a successful outcome (Brittian et al., 2009). One study looked at the use of ethnic clubs for peer mentoring, finding that more successful clubs tended to be more formal and had quality faculty leadership (Bowman et al., 2015). Programs that failed tended to be ones that were run with little direction and very little understanding of the desired outcomes. Fortunately, these were the exception in the literature reviewed in this study.

The current literature, generally, found many similarities regarding the impact of positive mentoring in higher education. Although research has been conducted in many different locations that vary in size, status, and percentage of minority students, the common theme of students participating in mentoring programs included having a higher level of desired outcomes. Such outcomes tend to be related to greater engagement and a student's sense of belonging that manifested itself into greater retention, which leads to or makes possible higher academic achievement. The existing studies, while using different methods, provide a rich foundation of

data that can demonstrate outcomes like increased GPAs, but also provide a glimpse into the way the mentored student achieved these successes.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

Mentoring of traditional-aged college students is not a new practice. When focusing on the more defined topic of mentoring minority students, several general themes emerge which include both students and the mentors themselves. The literature is rich in the sense that diverse types of colleges are included among various studies. A wide breath of literature exists with a balance of both qualitative and quantitate studies (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Estepp et al., 2017). Although much has been studied about mentoring, the relationship of existing studies is not always clear. This disconnection of previous literature ultimately creates a gap in the relevant literature where mentoring needs further exploration at small Christian PWI's in its role of supporting minority students. The evidentiary trail that ends in an empirical gap is explained below.

While quantitative studies have provided insight regarding the impact of mentoring for minority students (e.g., Okezie, 2018), they have not been able to address significant issues of diversity on smaller PWI Christian colleges. Leaders at small, private colleges with a history of being PWI have to overcome their own tendency to have a more diverse student body (Dahlvig, 2010). The issue of diversity at these colleges is also often self-identified by campus leaders as a great concern (Dahlvig, 2010).

Numerous studies reveal how individual experiences provide deep and rich content for analysis. Qualitative studies, for example, have been used successfully at small colleges or with small subsets of students at larger universities (Baber, 2012; Dahlvig, 2010; Dancy, 2010). Qualitative studies have also focused on faith and its role in terms of a minority student's college

experience (Ramirez et al., 2014; Small & MacDonald-Dennis, 2015; Yarbrough & Brown, 2012). Such studies provide a strong relationship to how faith of the student impacts college selection, however little research appears to sufficiently support this relationship in terms of how a college leadership team can leverage its faith to both recruit and retain minority students. The collection of interviews from these studies identified important items such as how a minority mentor might be more effective (Ecklund, 2013); however, the data does not exist in a large study to look at items such GPA and retention. Tinto's (2017) work suggests that the social connection that mentoring can influence would increase items like retention; however, there appears to be a gap in the literature regarding the positive outcomes mentoring provides with social connections and retention.

Although the research and literature is deep in relation to mentoring, certain gaps are apparent. While sometimes these are a result of the methodology and the setting, a gap nevertheless remains. Key studies (e.g., Dahlvig, 2010; Ramirez et al., 2014) have established a base and starting point to the research. However, as gaps become apparent and these studies age, a focus on items such as large quantitative studies that address topics of GPA, retention, and time to graduation of African American students at multiple PWI Christian colleges is needed. Although many studies have been conducted on this general topic of mentoring, further research should focus on mentor and its impacts specifically at small PWI Christian colleges.

Additional data on ways to increase enrollment and retention through programs such as mentoring would assist in diversify PWI Colleges with improved socialization of minority students. The PWI Christian College might also be one that is most in need of transformation in their racial demographic. A large multi-campus study of similar type universities may help to fill the gap in the research and further reveal how mentoring can work at its full potential. Absher

(2009) makes a good start, but also shows how much more data is needed to fully answer many of the unknown answers related to small Christian PWIs.

### **Conclusion**

Mentoring of minority college students clearly is supported as a successful strategy to support higher student achievement through improved socialization at the college. Mentoring is seen in many forms from formal programs to ad hoc relationships created between two individuals. When the goal is to improve the success of minority students at small PWI Christian colleges, strategies such as mentoring should be carefully examined. Small and Macdonald-Denis (2015) demonstrate that African American students are more successful when they are connected to the campus socially. This social connection is also important for retention (Tinto, 2017), a significant goal of any college campus.

The current body of literature provides a strong basis for the needs of socialization, for example, moving from feeling like an outsider to insider (Tinto, 2017). Additional research has identified that a minority mentor can be more effective (Dahlvig, 2010). Studies have focused on a wide array of setting and participants from very small PWI private Christian colleges (Dahlvig, 2010), HBCUs (Reeder & Schmitt, 2013), and large public universities (Watt, 2006), and from the perspectives of peer mentoring (Ward et al., 2014), group mentoring (Bowman et al., 2015), and mentoring of new faculty (Lechuga, 2014). Mentoring is a proven method to increase socialization of minority students, and thus is a significant research topic to improve diversity in higher education. Focus must be given to what the impact is with minority students at PWI that often are Private Religiously affiliated Colleges.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter describes the methods and methodology used to examine the effectiveness of improving socialization in relationships between African American students and professional mentors at a PWI, small Christian university in the Midwest. Following the conceptual framework of socialization through the lens of Boyer's (1990) communities, this study explores the impact that mentoring relationships have on the students involved. Case studies serve as a way to review a singular item in a specific setting and as a method to explore a unique case (Simons, 2009). Case studies are chosen when the context has clear boundaries and is isolated, such as a campus population of particular students (Creswell, 2014).

This study uses current literature as a way to review how mentoring minority students at different universities may increase student socialization, a significant factor in student success, which impacts both retention and graduation rates (Bowman et al., 2015). This qualitative case study provides an in-depth look at the impact of mentoring for helping students make social connections to other students, faculty, and staff. This chapter delineates the process of data collection and analysis, including the research question, purpose, sample, instruments, and limitations. The chapter concludes with the expected findings, as well as key ethical issues.

#### **Research Question**

Successful socialization has been identified as a way to increase student satisfaction (Strayhorn, 2009). Harper (2013) points to the fact that African American student enrollment at PWI colleges continues to rise, yet much needs to be done to assist and retain these students. In addition, Mangold (2002) stated that mentoring in general is found to increase long-range outcomes such as retention and graduation rates among African American students at PWI colleges. Following the conceptual framework of Boyer's (1990) communities, this case study

looks to see how the mentoring relationship afforded to students may impact their socialization at the college. Hence, this dissertation seeks to answer the research question: RQ1: How does professional mentoring impact an African American student's social connections at a Christian PWI?

### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

By exploring the answer to the research question, college employees may better use mentoring programs to improve the experience of African American students. Important outcomes may include the creation of better programs to assist students who find themselves a part of two seemingly different groups: a clear minority, but also a student growth population. Success may increase both enrollment and positive student success outcomes for a diverse student population.

In order to accomplish this purpose, a case study design is used. The use of case studies is considered a sound and valid research method when exploring a single case (Yin, 2014). Creswell (2014) states that a successful case study is defined within the unique case to be studied. In this study, the case involves one particular university with a specific population of students and their experiences that has occurred over the course of a relatively short period of time, that being less than two years. Previous research on this topic has also been built via case study methodology (McGovney-Ingram, et al., 2011; Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016).

Using case study methodology might be one of the soundest strategies to use in answering certain questions such as “How,” “Why,” or in this case “What is the impact” of a specific phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Although case studies can be more complex and follow a multiple case study format, this study is a single case study format. A multiple case study is used when the research seeks to compare several case studies, and often this is done by replicating a

single case experiment or method to multiple other cases to find similarities or differences (Yin, 2018). Since this study does not compare multiple cases and does correspond to a single experiment, a single case study design is the best fit (Yin, 2018). Although there are differences, Yin (2018) describes these two types to be variants of the same methodological design.

In addition to a single case study structure, the design follows a holistic method. Single case studies can allow for an embedded approach, meaning analysis can occur at different levels. Although an embedded method is still a single case, it does explore additional pieces in the case (Yin, 2018). The holistic method focuses on just one level. In this study's design, the focus is only on the impact that the students have with professional mentors and stops at this single level. Yin (2018) does describe potential issues with the holist approach, including the inability to change if the focus of the case study drifts mid-study. This study mitigates these concerns because the research question and study structure does lend itself to easily shift the study's focus.

This case study focused on college students attending a single Christian PWI private university in the Midwest. Students were part of an existing academically focused mentoring program. This study supports the basic purpose of this research, which in turn fosters successful methods of increasing socialization for African American students. The use of a case study design that focuses on individuals is an effective way to more clearly see how mentoring has affected these students (Yin, 2018). Their perspective allows for the evaluation of how well mentoring may be used to improve socialization.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

This entire case study was completed at a single private college in a suburban location in the Midwest, which historically has had a predominantly white undergraduate population. According to the college's website, in the academic calendar year 2017–2018, only 5.1% of

2,281 traditional undergraduate students were listed as African American. The same website reports that over 85% of the students are Christian. The college's governance is also still affiliated in a significant way with its founding church body.

All participants are either current or former students who have participated in a mentoring program within the last two years and were part of the program for a minimum of one semester. All participants must identify themselves as being African American. The criteria for participation also include a student's willingness to participate in this study.

The sampling method for selection of students includes purposeful sampling. This method utilizes a non-probable sample that is chosen based upon criteria set for the study (Gay & Airasian, 2000). A form of purposeful sampling, criterion sampling, is used to further set criteria for selecting subjects. In this case, if more than four participants had met the criteria and are willing to participate, a one-phase approach would have been used. This process allows for screening of the potential candidates from persons with knowledge of said candidates (Yin, 2014). If at this point more than four qualified candidates had met the criteria, a fifth participant would have been identified as an alternate and would replace anyone who might drop from the study after it begins. Five students were identified; however, one was removed from the study because they did not fit all of the criteria. Notification of the final selections were made via electronic means, and students were notified and scheduled for their interview.

Creswell (2014) states that a case study is typically limited to three or four participants. Dahlvig (2010) found that given a small potential population, the total number of qualified subjects ended up being very small. In this case, four candidates were used since one of the candidates did not meet all the criteria, which is the number of participants that Creswell (2014) suggests. This method randomly would have allowed the selection of the four out of the five to



be interviewed if all met all the criteria (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The combination of these methods ensures that participants met the specified criteria and the final number of participants is of an appropriate size.

Students were invited to participate by both the director of the existing program and the researcher. Invitations were extended via mass emails or by written correspondence (see Appendix D). Given the small population of approximately 11 students, every eligible student was invited to participate. Creswell (2014) identifies how case study research is often limited to four to five subjects. While qualitative studies allow credible research to be conducted with a smaller sample size, but the depth of information received from each sample must be much greater.

### **Instrumentation**

The main instruments for data collection are interviews and two focus groups. The main instrument is a semistructured interview with five to seven base questions, with a separate set of questions for the interview (see Appendix A) and the two focus groups (see Appendices B and C). After a draft of the questions were written, a pilot study was conducted using peer review of all three sets of questions. The pilot study evaluated the questions ensuring they are relevant to the study and follow the conceptual framework, are answerable, and written to the level of the audience. The pilot study used peer review and consisted of three university professors and administrators who regularly work with tradition undergraduate students. Each of the members had a printed copy of the questions and were read aloud each question one at a time. Suggestions and feedback were given by the panel that was collected in notes, I also recorded and transcribed the entire conversation. I then updated the questions after review from the notes and transcription of the pilot study itself.

Essentially, a large amount of data can be gathered in a short period of time with interviews and focus groups, given that the participant can convey experiences covering a long period of time all at once (Gay & Airasian, 2000). As the interview and focus group questions were created (see Appendices A, B, and C), the fact that a partially structured method of interviewing is used was considered. The flowing process of a semistructured interview allows a preset list of open-ended questions to serve as a starting point for data collection (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

The preset list of questions was constructed by keeping the research question and conceptual framework in mind. The criteria for constructing these questions includes: (a) alignment to the research question, (b) written simply and not asking several questions at once, and (c) written to the ability of the student to answer effectively (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Questions also align with one or more of these communities to answer the research question. The composite list includes all six of Boyer's (1990) communities that include purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative, in the exploration of the research question.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

Data collection is a key component of a qualitative study. The quality of the data helped determine the overall quality of the study. The main purpose of the data collection process is to accurately, thoroughly, and efficiently collect data that appropriately answers the research question. Because of this narrow focus, a certain set of data collection methods is often used. These methods include interviews, review of key documents, and a focus group of the professional mentors and second focus group with all of the student after the interviews (Yin, 2018). Each of these methods provide different strengths in the collection process, and have different levels of value depending on the structure of the case study (Creswell, 2014).

## **Interviews**

The use of interviews in a case study is a credible and dependable way to collect data (Creswell, 2014). Interviews, in conjunction with other methods, provide purposeful interactions with participants (Gay & Airasian, 2000). This method allows for meaningful data collection that other methods such as observations cannot, since the interview allows for a collection of experiences to be given at one time rather than over the course of an extended period.

The interview method for this study uses semistructured questions. This method of interviewing allows for an allocation of predetermined questions, yet allows me as the researcher to respond in a purposeful way to add, omit, and modify questions during the interview (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Questions are open-ended and afford opportunities for reflection from the participant. Exploration into other mentoring relationships that include teachers from high school, church leaders, or other community members are included. The goal is to engage with African American students to determine how mentoring has affected their socialization at the college. Questions and follow-up questions dive into what was helpful about these relationships, which things helped the student to remember relevant details and stories. In these interviews, questions regarding specific instances where mentoring has been personally helpful as well as where it needs to be improved are considered.

**Procedures.** In-depth interviews were conducted with the students that fit the necessary criteria of being students within the last two years and have been part of an existing mentoring program at the college. The student, first reviewed and sign the consent form (see Appendix G). The interviews themselves are formal in the sense that they were scheduled and occurred in a mutually agreed upon private place (Creswell, 2014). All of the interviews conducted for this study were audio-recorded in their entirety. Given the partially structured format, interview

responses needed to be documented as precisely as possible. An excellent method to accomplish this is to use audio recording (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Because interviews are formatted in a semistructured way and serve as a significant data collection of the study, the duration of each was longer in length than standard interviews. Interviews lasted up to an hour and a half in length (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Each of the interview audio recordings were transcribed within 24 hours of the interview. This process was completed by having the audio file sent through a digital solution that transcribed the audio file of the interview automatically. The use of digital translation allowed for a convenient and productive final transcript that was both timely and accurate (Creswell, 1998). The transcript did require a manual final review to clean up errors from the auto transcription. Field notes were maintained throughout the entire process of data collection (Creswell, 2014), which include items that the transcribed interview cannot. These included observations of the environment, nonverbal actions of the participants, and any other reflection during the interview that seemed worthy of documenting.

### **Focus Group**

In addition to the other data collection listed above, this study includes a focus group; a small group of individuals meeting together through a moderated conversation about aspects of the case study. The discussion aims to identify the views of the individuals while in the small group (Yin, 2018). The plan was that if too many individuals participated, two separate focus groups would be used, which would have allowed each to stay relatively small (Yin, 2018). This was not the case, and only one focus group was needed. A focus group is an efficient way to collect data in its nature of meeting with several people at the same time. This process reduces the repetition of ideas that single interviews might create with the same group. However, focus

groups do not allow for the safety that a private, confidential interview affords, since participants might not express themselves the same way in this more public data collection method (Yin, 2018).

**Procedures.** At the heart of the focus group is the participants (Yin, 2018). In this case study, they included the professional mentors as well as a second focus group with the students after their interviews. Mentors were contacted directly and asked to participate from a list of participants given to me by the program director. In this invitation, a description including the topics that was part of the focus group, along with the structure of the event was sent. Ideally, a minimum of four, with a maximum of six was desired, and ultimately five participated.

Much like the interviews, a semistructured set of questions are used (see Appendix B & C; Gay & Airasian, 2000). This approach includes a preset list of open questions but allowed for deviations from this list as needed. Questions can be added, deleted, or modified as needed (Gay & Airasian, 2000). All participating focus group members reviewed and sign a consent forms prior to starting (see Appendices F and G) as well as a prepared statement was read prior to the start to the mentors participating in the focus group to remind participants about privacy. The entire focus group conversation was recorded for complete transcription and analysis. The transcription process matched what was done with interviews, including the use of a digital transcription solution and a final review for accuracy. The second focus group with students was the last step of the data collection process. After all of the interviews were completed and initial reviews were done, the focus group allowed an in-depth focus on reviewing the initial outcomes from the students in their individual interviews.

## **Key Documents**

The process of collecting data includes several very significant documents. These documents attempted to serve as additional sources of data in best answering the research question. These documents included information on how the relationship of the mentor and mentee started, including initial communication from the program director, as well as program information and guidelines to the student and mentor. In addition, the mentor program journal that includes notes regarding each meeting is part of the data collection that was requested. Lastly, personal correspondence between the mentor and mentee which included emails as well as any other relevant written communication that can be obtained.

**Procedures.** In collecting the above items, three different groups of individuals are important for the collection: the program director, mentors, and mentees. The documents were attempted to be collected with different levels of complexity, the lowest being the program level information that is not student specific, general correspondence between the mentor and mentee, and the last being the more personal journal reflections of the mentor of the mentee.

Program level information was obtained directly from the director. In this information gathering, all program materials including initial letters and program materials were requested and obtained. These tended to be general in nature and not student specific, I requested this information directly. The second level of documents are the correspondence between the mentor and mentee. A written request went to both parties asking for this information; this request was accompanied by information about the student as well as a description of what the information is used for (see Appendix C). All correspondence was divided and kept within each subject's own data file. Last, copies of the mentor journals were requested via electronic requests of the

mentor. An additional description of what the material would be used for was included. The journal was included in the student's data file as well.

### **Data Analysis and Procedures**

The data analysis of this study went through several steps that strived for both thorough and creditable results. The overview of this process includes the review of the data, constant comparison, member checking, coding process, review and comparison of current literature, and finally peer review. Each of these steps help to transform the data into the key themes that provide the basis for the study's implications and conclusions.

After the completion of the interviews and transcriptions, and prior to starting the coding process, I thoroughly reviewed each of the interviews several times, ensuring proper transcription and reflection. In addition to the transcripts, information from the field notes was inserted for better context and clarity. At this point, the process of member checking was conducted. This step involves meeting with the students that were interviewed, allowing each student to make any edits as well to ensure the accuracy of what they wanted to disclose in the interview (Creswell, 2014). Notes from these interactions are added to my field notes as well.

The completed transcripts, after the member checking, were ready for the process of coding. This process, which also includes steps such as chunking, constant comparison, and constructing themes, is a part of the six-step process that Creswell (2014) describes. First, all data were reviewed again, and then reread to allow for a final global view of the information from all sources (Creswell, 2014). Once completed, the next step was to look at these documents again to get a sense of the larger meanings of each. After the end of this holistic view of the data, a list of topics were created which allowed for clustering these topics together (Creswell, 2014). Clustering is a method of taking like ideas and putting them together (Creswell, 2014).

When a preliminary list of topics and themes were created, I went through the data and start applying them, but also evaluate as different ones emerge. I then clustered data in an effort to reduce the list of total codes (Creswell, 2014). Chunking is a process of grouping or putting together individual data points into a meaningful single description (Creswell, 2014). At this point, I was able to create a system of abbreviation for the codes for easier and more effective labeling.

When the abbreviation list was finished, the attachment of these codes to the data was able to begin. The application of coding is essentially identifying parts of the text, bracketing it, and then identifying the code or theme to that part of the text (Creswell, 2014). The process of using the method of constant comparison was applied. This is the method in which a researcher constantly reviews existing categories with new data, determining if it is the same or different and in need of a new category (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Once completed, the data from each category was put into one place for preliminary analysis. As the researcher, I always had the option, if necessary, to recode the data as needed, a process that might take in some cases several attempts (Creswell, 2014). Next, the use of the coding process serves as the basis of the qualitative description of the setting of the case. The process of constructing themes is employed (Creswell, 2014). Working through this process allowed me to advance these themes as the qualitative narrative was written (Creswell, 2014).

At this point, additional analyses were conducted that included a review of the results from the existing literature and peer review (Creswell, 2014). Upon the completion of the coding, the findings were compared with current literature on the topic. This served as a review of how this data compares to data collected in different places and collected in different methods (Creswell, 2014). Peer review is set up by identifying a professional with knowledge on this



topic. Myself along with the peer, reviewed each of the interviews to ensure through the third person that the data is accurate (Creswell, 2014). Each of these methods add to the analytic rigor of the findings.

### **Limitations and Delimitation of the Research Designs**

Limitations are generally considered to be the constraints that a study has based on the circumstances being explored (Creswell, 1994). In general, qualitative studies often rely on the effort of the researcher. In this case, study limitations are clearly set by the design itself (Creswell, 2014). These include the case on which the study is focusing, this being a single campus with the particular and unique attributes of the setting. Also, this study has a small number of subjects that are part of the data collection, and only African American students are included.

General items that add to the uniqueness of this college include items such as its geography (American Midwest), the affiliated Christian denomination, the particular level of the current diversity, and the college's overall ethos. This study's design was only to include three to four students, which is considered appropriate for a case study (Creswell, 2014), but is limiting in the size of participants. Lastly, the study focused on students who identify themselves as African American. Diversity can mean much more than a single ethnicity; however, this study is not be all-inclusive.

Not unlike other data collection methods, interviews have limitations. Typically, these include how information is filtered through the interviews, how information is gathered in a designed place and not in the natural setting, and the possibility regarding how the interviewer can influence the answers (Creswell, 2014). The skill of interviewing is not equally mastered across all researchers. Often the level of skill and knowledge can vary from researcher to

researcher as well as to the relationship of the interviewee to interviewer (Creswell, 2014). In order to eliminate some of these items, all participants went through a pre-interview with the African American student union advisor. This interview was short but helped build trust with the student to help encourage better responses.

The study itself creates delimitations based on the boundaries prescribed in the study. This study is delimited to a Christian PWI. Although this case study is small in scope, given the delimitations, the focus is clear. The target, one Christian PWI in one geographic area, creates the focus and delimits the scope of the study. Many colleges have similar compositions to the institution in the study. Conceptual outcomes should be made and theory confirmed, disconfirmed, and/or developed for potential transfer to other settings (Creswell, 2014). In addition, this case study is limited to the interactions of a professional mentoring relationship. Growth that students might achieve from other interactions, such as athletic teams, social groups, academic circles, are not be included. Likewise, student growth is focused solely on socialization. Although other factors such as retention are often cited in studies such as Absher (2009), Bosco (2012), and Condon et al. (2013), socialization is the sole attribute studied.

### **Validation**

Data collection and analyses need specific, rigorous steps to increase validation, a significant consideration for any study. Three key points to consider with validation are credibility, dependability, and transferability. Credibility is achieved when readers develop trust in the data being accurate or trustworthy. Dependability is the idea that the data shows a systematic output and is not irregular (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, transferability is a concept that the outcomes of a study could be used in other contexts outside of this particular case study (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

## **Credibility**

In designing a study, Creswell (2014) suggests having multiple forms of validation. Certainly, the more options that are used, the more trustworthy the data is. In this case study, three key forms of validation are used: member checking, peer review, and triangulation. Member checking, as described previously, allows for validation by having the subject review what was said, add, delete and modify to most clearly state their intention (Creswell, 2014). In addition, peer review validates the data by having a second set of eyes review what data has been collected and evaluate it (Creswell, 2014).

Triangulation is the process of collecting data from different sources of evidence to support the findings (Creswell, 2014). Although triangulation can complicate a study by increasing expense as well as requiring multiple data collection, the divergent data sources increase the overall quality of findings (Yin, 2018). In this study, the multiple data points come from interviews with the participants, focus groups with the mentors and students, and key document collection from the program director, mentors, and mentees.

## **Dependability**

Dependability is achieved by demonstrating that the data from the study were collected following the established protocols; data were not collected outside of such described processes (Creswell, 2014). Steps to ensure dependability included comparing the outcomes from this study to others in the existing literature. Previous works, including Dahlvig (2010) and Brittian et al. (2009) are examples where comparing the results to other studies helped to augment dependability.

## **Transferability**

An important point in terms of validation is transferability or the ability to apply findings to other settings. In order to address transferability, the use of thick description of the case study is used (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Including intimate details at length helps the reader make decisions about what might be transferred to a different context. This does include explanations of the campus setting, demographics, and college climate or ethos in order to better understand the case and be able to transfer the findings.

## **Expected Findings**

This study is meant to explore the importance of mentoring, specifically the importance of increasing diversity at PWI Christian colleges by improving a student's social connection to campus. Mentoring is not new and many other studies have looked to explore the benefits that it can have on students. This study expects to find results that are consistent with previous work and that help to support further use and study in PWI Christian colleges with the goal that students go from feeling like an outsider to an insider by strengthening their social connections on campus (Tinto, 2017).

The main findings may include how mentoring may foster social connections, supporting the work of Dahlvig (2010). In addition, minority students may connect more with minority mentors, especially when they do not feel the need to explain why they are feeling the way they do (Waller et al., 2011). Findings are also expected to support how White faculty and staff have a place to help and be effective with socialization of minority students as well (Gordon, 2007). Lastly, the findings are expected to reflect the level of maturity in the program, meaning, procedures are established so that more administrative focus is on the student and less on how to

fix programmatic deficiencies. A mentoring program needs to be structured and well planned; if it is not, the outcomes might be less than desirable in meeting goals (Estepp et al., 2017).

### **Ethical Issues**

Any study using a qualitative methodology must consider ethical issues in order to produce an ethical research project. In addition, I was most often intimately involved with the study through frequent interactions with participants rather than just counting survey results (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Anticipating ethical issues that include biases from the researcher (see Chapter 1) and participants are also significant items to address in building a study (Creswell, 2014). Some of the ethical issues in this study include conflict of interest concerns stemming from my current employment, as well as concerns of protecting student subjects where the ability to safeguard privacy might be difficult.

### **Conflict of Interest Assessment**

Conflicts of interest often come from my previous professional and personal experiences and values (Creswell, 2014). My assessment of conflict lies primarily in the fact that I have a professional association with the college where this program is occurring. The fact that I may know participants of the study could lead to conflict in this study. These previous relationships could cause a reporting conflict. This conflict is addressed in order to obtain the best data possible. This is accomplished by being very clear to the participants about what the study included and that their identity is protected. Through the screening process, these details are reviewed and helped to establish trust between the subjects and myself.

### **Other Ethical Issues**

One of the primary methods of collecting data for case study projects is via interviews. This method leaves open areas of concern for the participants that include privacy and their

overall well-being (Creswell, 2014). First steps included gaining permission from the local site to conduct such research. This was done in a written and formal way where a campus official was able to grant consent to the study. In addition, the entire data collection and analysis process was submitted for third party review via the Concordia University–Portland IRB. This group ensured that safeguards are adequately described for all involved.

Although the IRB is the last step before conducting the research, there are other formal entities to assist with ethical research. One of these formal entities that served as a helpful resource is the American Psychological Association (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA, 2016). This guide of ethical principles provided guidance in the following key areas of ethical research: resolving ethical issues, privacy and confidentiality, and record keeping (APA, 2016).

Creswell (2014) suggests that qualitative researchers identify ethical issues before they arise. For example, all participants are provided full disclosure regarding both the purpose of this study and methods of data collection. This includes how participant privacy was ensured, where the ability for the participant to opt out must be given. In addition, a well-defined process ensures that all participants received the same treatment. The university in the study was treated with respect as well. Data collected has not, nor will at any future point be shared outside of each participant, though study findings are communicated in a way that university personnel can use as they see fit. I have invested in both the location and program before and after the study. This has been done by both getting a deep understanding of both the history and current status of the program, as well as providing the program director information that this study gathered that could be used to improve total program outcomes. Therefore, both positive and negative results are reported to help with the objective of investing in the program (Creswell, 2014).

There were unforeseen issues which were difficult to anticipate prior to the start of the study. One is the issue of interacting with the participants after the study is over. This would include working with the same student or mentor in a different project or academic endeavor. In addition, consideration was made regarding how to handle unexpected information. This might have included items such as criminal behavior or other institutional issues that this study was not looking to identify. Gay and Airasian (2000) suggest that the issue of criminal behavior is an example of a very difficult ethical dilemma: what will I ignore and not react and where must follow up actions occur? In the disclosure process, this issue was addressed and an overview of what my response was made clear. What is defined as a minor incident was overlooked; however, a major crime such as a felony would need to be reported. The subject would be notified of this action prior to the report. In the end this was not needed as no issues of this nature came to light during the data collection.

In the end, I conducted an ethical study. From the creation of the disclosure, to interview questions, and interactions with the participants, the highest level of ethical scrutiny was used. Use of tools like the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct from APA (2016) to the screening process that the IRB ensured a highly ethical process. Creswell (2014) further states that ethical behavior also includes the overall project. The researcher must follow basic integrity standards such as not plagiarizing and giving final data that is fair and objective.

In all of this, I gave ethical priority to the participants for the protection of their personally identifying information and data. Data is stored on a password protected computer file that only I have access to. All data will be destroyed, by deletion of the computer file, three years after the completion of the research. Subject data must be kept confidential and personally identifying information must be removed to protect the identities of individual participants and

the research site (Yin, 2018). In a case study design, where personal interviews are being used, the potential breach of personal identifiable information being exposed might be higher than in other research designs. Safeguards include assigning each subject a research number and being careful in the amount of information that is published about any one subject. Personal items to be cautious about include items such as hometown, major, and extra-curricular involvement. The researcher only reported broad, general descriptions from the data.

### **Summary**

A case study allows for a well-focused study, where typically four or five participants may provide adequate data saturation and meaningful analyses (Creswell, 2014). This methodology is well matched to the purpose of investigating the impacts of professional mentoring on African American students at a Christian PWI institution. The case college is moderately sized to allow for a modest population sample. This method allows for effective research in this setting.

Interview questions explored how the conceptual framework of students connecting socially to the institution via Boyer's (1990) six communities. The questions looked into the effectiveness of mentoring in working through the communities and the effect it has on the student's social connections. Chapter 4 outlines the results of these interviews, find common themes, and determine how Boyer's theory may be relevant in fostering a student's social connections.



## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of mentoring on the social connections of minority African American students. A qualitative single case study was conducted and included interviews with four minority students in order to explore their experiences with mentoring at a private Christian PWI university in the Midwest. Additional data were collected from focus groups of mentors and the students themselves. In this chapter, an overview of the sample, research methodology, and extensive analyses are included with a discussion of the findings from the data.

The topic of diversity at PWI Christian universities is not novel and continues to be of great concern for many university leaders (Paredes-Collins, 2009). Many leaders of colleges with little to no student diversity have attempted to increase diversity for a variety of reasons. Christian university and college leaders have historically tended to fall into this category and have a mixed bag of success with different strategies to bolster diversity (Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016). Christian college leaders often view increasing diversity as missional and consistent with the Great Commission directive in the 25th chapter of the Biblical book of Matthew.

Minority students enrolled at PWI Christian colleges must not be forgotten after they step on campus, and college administrations must work to create social connections for these students. Minority students often leave a college based on lack of fit or connection (Waller et al., 2011). Establishing mentoring programs has had promising results as a strategy for improving student experiences within a diverse population, (Brittian et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to determine whether mentoring African American students would increase their social connections at a Christian PWI university lacking a diverse population and consequently,

increase their feelings of belonging and acceptance at that university. Students with strong social connections are more likely to stay enrolled at a university and be more engaged with their college community (Tinto, 2017).

The data collection process included both the creation of the study's methodology, the actual collection of the data, and then data analysis. In determining the research design, a plan to gather data that would best answer the research question was constructed. In this situation, a single case study was chosen as the best fit. Data collection was primarily based on interviews with four students, a small number that is statistically significant enough to be considered a valid qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). In addition to these key interviews, two separate focus groups of mentors and the interviewed students were held. The interview and focus group questions were drafted and went through review via a pilot study. All of the interviews and pilot studies were conducted then transcribed. This process ensured privacy since I was the only person to see all data.

Universities such as this have a long history of monoculturalism, but in past decades college leaders have desired to change this (Dahlvig, 2010). Desire has not always equaled success, as college leaders have continued to struggle with creating racially diverse campuses. Christian colleges have great potential to be a strong fit for minority students. Many minority students cite their connection to faith as a reason for choosing a particular Christian institution (Dancy, 2010). Exploring ways to increase the success and inclusion of minority students during their college careers and affording a pathway for colleges to grow in their African American student populations are at the core of this study.

### **Description of the Sample**

The research methodology used a qualitative single case study design. To accomplish this, a series of semistructured interviews were conducted with a small African American population of undergraduate students. As Gay and Airasian (2000) describe, the semistructured interview affords the use of a preset of questions, yet also gives discretion for the researcher to add, skip, and alter questions in the interviews and focus groups. Both sets of samples (students and mentors) were recruited from a defined set of criteria as described in Chapter 3 and volunteered to be part of the study. Use of the program director was helpful in identification of potential students and mentors.

The setting of this study and sole source of sample participants was a single private Christian PWI in the Midwest. This historically Caucasian campus listed a small African American population of approximately 5% of the 2,300 traditional undergraduate students in the 2017–2018 academic calendar year. The college is still affiliated in a significant way with the church body of its origin. The church body as a whole also suffers with a lack of diversity in its overall membership and leadership.

The criteria for the student sample directed that the students were part of the university mentor program within the last two years and identified him or herself as African American, as described in depth in Chapter 3. With help from the mentoring program director, a potential list of 11 students was identified. This list served as the basis of the recruitment population and were then engaged via an email and by the request of the program director. Of the 11 students contacted, five replied and made an appointment to review the confidentiality agreement and the methodology of the study. After this review, all five agreed to continue; however, it was discovered during the interview that one of the participants did not meet the criteria and the

individual was excused from the study. This student is identified as Student 5. Table 1 describes the class standing, gender, and participation status of the original study participants and provides them a random ID that is used in identification.

Table 1

*Student Participant Demographics*

Student ID	Gender	Class Standing	Included in Study
1	Female	Freshmen	Yes
2	Female	Junior	Yes
3	Male	Senior	Yes
4	Male	Junior	Yes
5	Male	Freshmen	No

The second sample group consists of full-time university employees that served as mentors within the same program. A list of potential candidates was created by the program director and five potential subjects were identified. A single email was sent out and all five agreed to be part of the single focus group. The sample consisted of both African American and Caucasian mentors as well as both professional staff and faculty. Refer to Table 2 for a full listing of the mentors' employment statuses, genders, and race. All participation as a mentor in this program was voluntary with no compensation of any kind.

Table 2

*Mentor Participant Demographics*

Mentor ID	Employment Status	Race	Gender	Years of Mentoring at University
A	Staff	Caucasian	Female	5
B	Faculty	African American	Female	6
C	Faculty	African American	Male	2
D	Faculty	Caucasian	Male	4
E	Staff	Caucasian	Male	5

**Research Methodology and Analysis**

In determining the impacts of mentoring on African American students' social connections, the basic demographics of the institution were reviewed. In this situation, the number of the potential sample size was relatively small. To best answer this study's question, more depth was needed, which accounted for the appropriateness of a smaller sample size (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative case study design afforded an in-depth approach to answering the research question, affording meaningful results that went far beyond any yes/no response.

**Methodological Approach**

This research study uses a qualitative single case study design. It created a narrow focus (Yin, 2018) of how mentoring impacts a student's social connections. The students who fit the criteria of self-identifying as African American, also recently participated in the university mentoring program within the last two years. This method of a qualitative single case study afforded a smaller sample and provided rich content via in-depth responses to each question.

Qualitative research is a dependable and accepted research method that best fits a study such as this with a small population and tightly focused research question that examines the

impacts of an action (Creswell, 2014). Individual interviews lasted over an hour and were conducted in a private office after the student was informed of the study process, and had read and signed the consent form. After transcription was completed, usually with 48 hours, a follow-up process of member checking allowed a participant to review the transcript and make any changes to the interview transcript. I made contact via electronic means with the subject notifying them of the completion of the transcript and requesting a meeting time for review. The student would meet with me in a private office location where the written transcript was provided. The student was given a pen and left alone to edit the transcript. The student was not given any time restraints and was able to be as complete in review as desired. The marked-up copy was edited by me creating a new and updated electronic version of the transcript. This was completed prior to any review of the data.

Procedurally, these steps follow those outlined in Chapter 3; however, coordinating college student schedules, including timely responses to emails, proved to be a significant logistical challenge that resulted in a lengthier time span to collect the data. Initially it was anticipated this process would take approximately three weeks, but it actually took six weeks. The student focus group included all four of the students that were part of the interview process. Although the time between interviews and student focus group was longer than anticipated, it still was not so long that students had forgotten what they said in their interviews.

Significant data also came from a focus group with mentors. In this focus group, mentors who partnered with an African American student were invited to participate. The goal as listed in Chapter 3 was four to six participants, and in the end five participated. There was no one-to-one connection between the mentors and mentees, meaning not every mentor that participated

had their mentee in the study. Since this was not a focus of the study, it is unknown how many mentor/mentee pairs actually existed.

### **Coding Approach**

Once the data were collected and transcribed, analysis began after each interview, using trusted and widely accepted processes for finding meaning in the interview and focus group data. Generally, the process included chunking, coding, and constant comparison (Creswell, 2014). These fundamental qualitative data review strategies served as the basis of all analyses.

Prior to the first review of coding and after member checking, an additional review of all the transcripts was conducted. This allowed for a review of all the content, which was beneficial due to the use of constant comparison. The last step prior to the start of coding, and as described in Chapter 3, was the use of peer review for each of the interviews. A professional with knowledge on the topic was identified by myself, and this individual served as a peer reviewer of all of the interviews. After these consults and validation of the data, the chunking and coding process began.

As noted in Chapter 3, the six-step process described by Creswell (2014) was followed. The next step included creating a list of codes relevant to addressing the research question, and the process allowed creation of additional codes as review of the data continued. This continued throughout all of the data sets. During this step, the process of constant comparison was used which required continuous review of the codes and categories already defined and how best to apply them (Creswell, 2014). A system of abbreviation was created to match the data more efficiently. The process of applying codes and using constant comparison in the process of chunking helped with developing similar codes (Gay & Airasian, 2000). While working with a long list of codes, the process of putting them all into a separate document was completed to

assist in the process of clustering (Creswell, 2014). Clear themes emerged among the codes, hence affording the categorizing of the codes. At this point, further review was conducted with the same professional used prior for additional peer review, and affirmation of the results was provided.

### **Key Document Review Approach**

Quality research should include multiple forms of validation that adds credibility to any study (Creswell, 2014). One of the identified strategies in Chapter 3 to increase credibility was to use triangulation. In this study design, triangulation is achieved by collecting data from several different sources in order to support the findings. In this study, data were collected from interviews and a focus group from four students, a focus group consisting of five mentors, and lastly, a review of key documents regarding the program.

Document solicitation included publicly available documents, items from the mentors, email exchanges between mentors and mentees, and resources provided by the program director. Items from the first two avenues proved to be very limited. Publicly accessible documents that were listed on the institution's website included mention of the mentoring program but not much more. Mentor documents were limited mostly to an incomplete set of emails regarding items such as scheduling and other non-relevant administrative items, these items did not contribute any relevant data to answering the research question. The items from the program director that were not widely available provided some insight into the program. The program documents from the director included items that describe the purpose and objectives of the mentoring program. Although primarily aimed at improving student academics, the documents provided a wider and more comprehensive mentoring objective to the students. The items were reviewed against the themes and codes, serving as additional validation of the research data.



## Summary of the Findings

Data in this study were collected, reviewed, chunked, coded, and clustered while using constant comparison. Three significant major themes which address the research focus of mentoring on students' social connectedness were identified. These three major themes include the connection to the mentor, overcoming social isolation, and involvement in campus activities. Table 3 identifies these three major themes and provides a quick definition of what these ideas encompass.

Table 3

### *Major Theme Identification with Short Description*

Major Themes	Short Description
A significant and lasting relationship was created between mentees and mentors that established trust and a circle of influence.	The social relationship created between mentee and his/her mentor was significant and valuable and served as a basis for improved socialization.
Mentoring reduced barriers and self-isolating behaviors which were hindering student socialization and acclimation.	The student assimilates to the college community, becoming more connected and feeling less isolated as a result of the mentoring relationship.
Mentoring encouraged greater student involvement in both academic and cocurricular participation.	Mentors provided support and guidance to the student to encourage increased involvement both inside the classroom and outside via cocurricular events. This led to greater connection with the university and peers.

### **Major Theme 1**

**A significant and lasting relationship was created between mentees and mentors that established trust and a circle of influence.** The first theme was the most compelling, as it was a significant focus in each interview and both focus groups. This item speaks to the power of relationships in an effective mentoring environment. A significant relationship was created that featured a common connection that grew with trust and authentic sense of care provided by

the mentor. The common connection was different in each interview but included items such as gender, interests, and/or prior connections. The mentors' willingness to make their mentee a priority often was the basis of the growing trust and care that was felt by the mentee. The authentic relationship provided a safety net for the mentees to fall back on and gave them someone they trusted to ask advice. This was significant to all other themes, because without this, mentees may not have acted on the mentor's nudges for he or she to become more involved with peers, teachers, or with campus activities.

## **Major Theme 2**

**Mentoring reduced barriers and self-isolating behaviors which were hindering student socialization and acclimation.** Feeling isolated while on campus was a common concern identified by the mentees. Most students previously attended a much more diverse or primarily African American high school, so being a minority in the student population was something with which they were not accustomed. A common reaction to this change of demographic in their college was to feel isolated from the group. Several students identified this as being self-inflicted, but it was nonetheless real. Mentors commonly identified this as a crisis in their student's lives and through encouragement helped reduce the behavior of isolation. General ways mentors accomplished this was by encouraging students to stay on campus on weekends versus going home, to connect with roommates more socially, and to help the student deal with negative interactions in which the student felt uncomfortable.

## **Major Theme 3**

**Mentoring encouraged greater student involvement in both academic and cocurricular participation.** The last major theme related to mentors encouraging students to be more involved on campus. Often this included joining clubs and organizations, but it also went

much deeper. Mentees reported that mentors encouraged them to find opportunities to grow in their personal faith. This included attending university worship and small group Bible studies. Mentees were also encouraged to interact socially as well as academically with classmates by participating in class discussions and joining or leading out of class study sessions. Being more involved, academically, personally, and socially, created a greater sense of connection to the college as a whole.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

The data output describes three significant results or major themes. These points described as major themes describe three unique parts of the mentor process that were found in the research. In addition to the major themes, three additional subthemes are identified in support of each major theme. Tables 4, 5, and 6 provide a list of these subthemes by their associated major themes. The subthemes help provide additional insight and support to described of the overall major theme.

The three main themes all appear to work together to create an opportunity for mentees to grow in their social connections. The process starts with building a relationship with the mentor. Already his or her social isolation was reduced and as that relationship deepened, mentees began to blossom and develop meaningful involvement on campus. Although some of the themes might seem expected, the interconnection of the three major themes and how the student grew through these themes is significant. This connection is explored more and in depth later in this chapter.

The use of triangulation provided data from several sources, creating increased reliability on the data (Creswell, 2014). These sources include interviews and a focus group with four students, a focus group with mentors, and key documents.

Table 4

*Subthemes From Major Theme 1 (Relationships) With Descriptions*

Subtheme of Major Theme 1	Description
Trust was a necessary component in the mentorship bond.	The mentor created a safe environment to facilitate a successful relationship built on trust with the mentee
The mentor provided sound advice to help the mentee make positive decisions.	The mentor took interest in the student's difficulties and offered suggestions and assistance to the mentee so he/she made good decisions in regards to his/her college experience
The mentor became an advocate on behalf of the mentee within the university.	The mentor spoke positively about the mentee in the college community, and the mentor actively advocated for the student with other faculty and university offices.

Table 5

*Subthemes From Major Theme 2 (Overcoming Isolation) With Descriptions*

Subtheme of Major Theme 2	Description
Mentors facilitated cultural adjustments to the PWI Christian university.	Mentors assisted the student in their exploration of the culture of the campus and offered advice to help mentees assimilate into that culture.
A successful mentorship relationship provides positive reinforcement to the mentee.	Providing constant encouragement to the student, focusing on their self-worth and identity improves all aspects of a mentee's university experience.
Mentors were a valuable life coach for mentees.	Mentors gave suggestions and guidance toward mentees' out of class experiences. This covers a wide range of items focusing on being a successful self

Table 6

*Subthemes From Major Theme 3 With Descriptions*

Subtheme of Major Theme 3	Description
Participation in academic activities is essential for success.	The act of encouraging the student to participate in a meaningful way in academic settings, class, meetings with faculty, study groups
Membership in university cocurricular entities is important.	Students were encouraged to participate and join cocurricular activities, including clubs and sport teams
Improved connection within the university aids in assimilation.	Mentees grow from feeling like an outsider to moving into an insider. They identify with the college in a meaningful way

The following narrative describes the data results in depth.

**Major Theme 1: A Significant and Lasting Relationship was Created Between Mentees and Mentors that Established Trust and a Circle of Influence**

This first major theme sets the basis for future success for student social connections. In this, the research from student interviews and focus group, mentor focus group, and key documents highlight the significant personal relationship that mentoring created between the pair. This was often the first significant relationship a mentee created on campus. This relationship allowed the mentor to gain trust and credibility, then later guide the student on a path of social growth at the university.

**Subtheme 1A: Trust.** Trust was a necessary component in the mentorship bond. The connection that mentees have with their university mentors had a significant impact on the student's social connections. One would expect a natural result of a mentoring program would be the formation of a quality relationship between individuals, but the relationships were found to impact the mentees much more significantly than expected. This subtheme is the most

significant, because it is the basis for not only a successful mentoring relationship but also is foundational to all other social connections the mentees made from that point forth.

The bonds formed between mentee and mentor were presented as strong and long lasting, even beyond the lengths of the university mentoring program. This was very apparent in each of the interviews and was confirmed by students in the focus group. These relationships tended to all have similar characteristics that impacted many areas of the students' college experiences. Student 3 stated in his interview, "My mentor did not go away when I was done [with the program], unlike my coach who did not talk to me when I stopped playing." The student recognized that a genuine care and concern for his well-being as a person existed for his mentor, and that relationship consequently continued outside of the mentorship program and beyond the mentor's designated duties. Each of the students in this study described how they still have a relationship with their mentor, although they might not see them as often all four indicated they still were in contact and still considered the mentor a resource.

Every relationship must find its capstone and build from there for it to be successful, and these mentoring relationships were no different. In each of the interviews, a common relatable characteristic emerged that helped start the relationship. This common bond was unique to each pair, but was a trait on which the pair could build their relationship. In one case, gender was the initial commonality, which served as the foundation for a relationship as the mentor could identify with the perspective of a female college student. Student 2 stated "I could just tell her things that only another girl would understand." In another case, this connection was the shared interest of athletics. The mentor had previously played the sport in which the mentee was actively participating. This gave the pair an instantaneous conversation piece. Another example was that the mentor knew the mentee while he was in high school. The mentor knew the

student's mother and watched him participate in high college sports. Lastly, although both in the pair were African American, the fact they were both first generation college students was the most significant bonding commonality.

Although a connection was found in each pair, it does not appear that this is a major effort in the programs pairing process. The director indicated that minimal effort was put into this, however acknowledged that more should be done in strategic pairing. It was clear from the focus group that the mentors often felt that this connection, often different than what they would have predicated, developed as the relationship grew. The example of the first-generation bond shows how the conversations around this topic became the most significant item, more than race.

Student 2 in her interview perked up when asked in the interview: "While you were enrolled in the mentoring program, how would you describe your experiences with mentors?" Her face lit up and she mentioned that she and her mentor would refer to their time as a sort of girl time, "she was always so happy to see me." The connection to gender was helpful to her. It was a connection that the two leveraged and built on. It appears to have been somewhat superficial at first, chatting about things such as hair, make up, and shoes, but soon conversations turned much deeper as time continued.

In the mentoring pair where there was prior history in their relationship, it was used to increase the bond between the two. Student 4 stated in his interview that he went to high school with his mentor's son and that his mentor knew his mother, "he would always ask how my mom was since he knew her from before." Often the mentor would ask about the student's mother, and he would ask about the mentor's son who was attending a different college. Clearly, given Student 4's reaction of genuine thankfulness this was a meaningful, personal connection that

made the student feel connected on a more intimate level to the mentor and also helped him stay connected with his high school peer.

In this study, there was one student who was paired with an African American mentor, notably, though, Student 1 found greater connection with the fact that both were first generation college students rather than their common race. In her interview, student 1 stated “I met (my mentor) at an orientation event for first generation students, and he was really understanding of what I was going through.” It appears that this student was very self-aware of her first-generation status, in addition to that of being a minority race at the university. Given the tone from her interview and other comments, most likely family influences impact that which also created great expectations that she be successful in college.

Although finding these commonalities were very important for the student to begin to build a relationship with the mentors, the mentors did not seem to need a common attribute or interest in order to create a connection with their student. Mentors did state that the need for a strong relationship was important to having a successful mentorship, although it most likely was not as important for the mentor to connect to the mentee. This appears that the mentors are more trusting of the student from day one and have had previous mentoring experiences. Mentors were well aware of the power of a common connection in building that relationship and stated they used that to grow and build the relationship between mentor and mentee. Mentor B explained that being both the same race and gender as a mentee makes it easier for a mentee of the same demographic to feel comfortable sharing concerns or challenges which related to gender or race. “I have many African American females that seem to gravitate to me and I feel that is because I too am African American and female.” Mentors identified that traits like race and gender were significant points of commonality to have with a mentee.



Clearly, mentors did not appear to need a common interest to build a relationship with a student. Most identified the genuine enjoyment of one-on-one student interaction as their motivation. Mentor C stated in the focus group that many interesting things are uncovered about students when you just talk to them and listen, “I learn a lot about the students I mentor by just letting them talk.” Although not needed for the mentors as much as mentees, it was clear that mentors were quick to identify common connections and use them for relationship growth. Two in particular that commented on the benefit of a common biographical trait were Mentor B in terms of being an African American women and Mentor A who has a connection to the university’s intercollegiate athletic program.

Mentor B gave several examples in the mentor focus group regarding how she has been informally approached by female, African American students who are essentially seeking a mentor. Often in mentoring, she uses common traits as connection points to help students because of instances like these. She connects with minority students by sharing her personal experiences of navigating a PWI university as a faculty member in the ethnic and gender minority. The similar, shared experiences allow her to be a trustworthy role model and positive mentor.

Mentor A in the focus group shared several stories which exemplify how the sports culture at the university is often able to transcend demographics. The point that Mentor A made was that in her opinion, student athletes operate under the belief that their lives are different than those of other students. They have practices and competitions, have to train off-season and have perceived additional responsibilities. Her intimate knowledge of this allows the student athlete mentee to see her as very understanding, supportive, and trustworthy. As she put it, “they think I get it, and understand the demands that they face.” This perception of the mentors understanding

of the student athlete plight assists in students feeling that she understands and they will not need to explain what they are feeling. The connection, not unlike others, is a relationship ignitor for many students.

In addition to the common interests, the relationships grew from the actions of the mentors. Students cited feeling that the mentor was excited to see them during meetings. In her interview, student 2 stated several times that whenever she saw her mentor “she was so excited to see me” and compared it to seeing family. The mentors were described by several students in their focus group that they would present themselves as genuinely being happy and friendly and were working on creating a personal relationship between the pair. The mentors stopped what they were doing or at a minimum found a time they could meet. All four of the mentees felt that the mentors were genuine and honest and opened up about themselves as well.

Mentees cited that mentors related personal stories and reflections to help relate to the student, and made themselves available, even so far as giving out their cell phone numbers. This access was given universal to the mentees, not one interview indicated that a mentor did not do anything they could to be available. Mentor E in the focus group shared that he feels it important to open up to the mentee, even being vulnerable. He shared about his personal life and struggles when appropriate. He also stated the he gave out his cell phone number so students could text him, “I think just the little act of giving my cell number out so they can text me means a lot to the students.” This was an interesting point that was made by both mentors and mentees. Student 2 stated the she had her mentor’s cell number and felt comfortable texting her whenever she wanted, including on weekends and evenings. Mentor C stated that he gave out his number for practical reasons but also knew it was a gesture of good faith and an important way to connect with the student.

Mentors often attended games or other events in which the mentees were participating. This act was repeatedly mentioned as a significant way that mentees felt important and validated. Student 4 stated that his mentor often started the meeting by asking about the previous night's game. The mentor was also a regular spectator at the game. It was an easy topic to start a conversation and was an avenue into possibly more personal and/or difficult aspects of the conversation. Mentors regularly sought out the student and did not passively wait for the student to find them or make an appointment to see them. Student 1 stated that in her first two weeks of the academic year her mentor was everywhere. "He was at the orientation, he would see me in the cafeteria, in the union; he was everywhere." Not only did the student mention frequent interactions with her mentor, but noted that he always went out of his way to engage with her, even if only for a minute or two.

These dynamic relationships were beneficial to both parties. Although the mentors repeatedly described their role as an advocate, they also described how meaningful connections with students help them stay relevant with college age students. As the mentee's social connections grew, so did the mentor's connection with the mentee. As described, the common theme of trust building was evident with both the students and mentors. Although not part of this study, the mentors repeated stated how beneficial it was for them both academically and personally to have a mentee to work with.

**Subtheme 1B: Sound advice.** The mentor provided sound advice to help the mentee make positive decisions. The mentoring program in this study focuses on academic achievement, since students are recommended to the program based on either their entry high school GPA or previous university GPA. Students with a 2.0 or below GPA who were accepted into the university are recommended to participate in the program as a means to provide

academic and transitional support to students who may struggle. Although the program is offered based on academic achievement, (Freeman, 1999) mentoring can provide success to all student regardless of current academic achievement. Although academic performance is a significant goal and a trigger for enrollment into the program, key program documents provide resources to mentors to go beyond just academics. Both students and mentors described how this relationship around academics is often where student growth is shown on paper.

Once a sound relationship, built on mutual respect and trust is formed, the mentor can widen his or her scope of influence in the mentee's life. Subtheme 1b focuses on the mentor's ability and willingness to offer meaningful advice on a wide breadth of topics that could and likely would impact student success. Certainly, a key part of this advice often fell into academic support. Key program documents and statements from students in both their interview and the final student focus group support this. An example was related by Student 4 about a project that he was assigned in a class. The assignment was to create and give a demonstration speech. The mentor/mentee pair worked together to problem solve how he could use his athletic interest in the speech. The mentee returned with a draft of the speech detailing how to shoot a basketball lay-up. The mentor helped the student accomplish procedural items such as getting permission for such a speech and working out logistics like reserving the gym. The mentor then helped the student edit and practice the speech. In the end, the student succeeded in the assignment and both shared in the success. "It ended up being really good, he helped talk me through each step of the process" (Student B).

Problem solving is a common occurrence in this subtheme. In the previous example, it involved a class assignment, but Mentor A, C, and E indicated in the mentor focus group that often this problem solving involved how to work with others. Mentor A stated that a common

scenario was when a student might have something come up that they needed to share with a faculty member, such as a missed class. She indicated that she would provide advice regarding how to write an email to the professor: “You cannot write your faculty the same way you snap chat your friend.” Others like Mentor E shared how he would advise students how to talk to university administrators when an issue arose. Mentor C added that even interacting with student leaders like RAs can initially be a stressful event for the students in the mentorship program.

Mentors took opportunities with the mentees to coach them to become more sufficient students and people. Mentor E stated that he attempted to always leave the student with something that would make him or her more successful. This coaching is an ongoing process of self-improvement. The coaching occurred in a wide variety of instances from academic skills like writing to general life lessons. Mentor E stated that when offering a life lesson, he often drew on his own experiences, “I like to tell students about how I have failed.” He explained that opening up and allowing himself to be vulnerable was the most successful strategy he found when working with mentees in these personal ways. As noted previously, mentees valued such personal insight and it did make a lasting impression.

Mentors generally also saw their role as helping students stay accountable to both course work and goals that may have been created. Student 2 shared that she and her mentor created goals, and each time they met they would review their status. Since they had created such a positive relationship, it was not a threatening conversation even when the student had not met the goal. Both student and mentor stated that a typical meeting included a conversation on the status of course work and grades. Student 3 stated that he would “always try to get my stuff done”

before he met with the mentor so he did not have to tell him he had missing work, indicating that the mentor's opinion mattered to him and he was a person the student didn't want to disappoint.

Each of the five mentors in the focus group spoke regarding the importance of encouraging their student as much as they could. Mentors commonly noted student self-doubt was present early on in the semester. This is not surprising, given how isolated these students often were at the start of their college experience. Therefore, mentors were consciously as positive, reassuring, and encouraging as possible to build up the students' self-worth and self-image. Mentor D stated that sometimes he saw his biggest role as a "cheerleader" and that his mentee started off having no self-confidence. Working to find wins to build upon was an important relationship building strategy for him.

The ability to reference and discuss faith in terms of personal growth is unique to Christian-based universities versus public state universities and it was a building block for all mentorships and mentioned in the mentee interviews and mentor's focus group. The Christian college ethos allowed for the integration of faith into the relationship. Three of the four students identified that faith was a factor for attending the college, and the fourth felt its importance after enrolling. Mentors were described as being active in the faith development of the student. Student 2 described the infusion of faith as maximizing all that is good with the college. The Christian ethos of the campus was evident in how students were treated and in this allowed for a deeper and more meaningful relationship. Student 3 stated that: "I attended a Christian high school, so it felt normal go to a Christian college."

**Subtheme 1C: Advocacy.** The mentor became an advocate on behalf of the mentee within the university. In addition to relationship building and providing advice, the idea of student advocacy emerged from the conversations, which serves as the third subtheme. Internal

advocacy was constantly present within the mentoring relationship in which the mentor reassured the student, encouraged him or her, and spoke highly of the individual within their meetings to bolster low self-confidence. Mentors also advocated for the mentee outside of the relationship and volunteered to help the student complete an administrative task or spoke to a university administrator or faculty member on the student's behalf. In the mentor focus group, Mentor D stated that it was his belief that advocating was one of the most important actions that a mentor could do for a student, "I feel that being an advocate is one of the most important things I do for the student." He stated that he might not be able to help the student in a class with the academic materials; however, he certainly could help facilitate a conversation between the faculty member and student. Advocacy truly was a key role for this mentor and what he felt was one of the most important things he could do. Advocacy was not the mentor fixing the student's problem for him or her but was providing a stepping stone or beginning point for the student. Often once a door was open and resources seemed more approachable, the student felt compelled to follow-up on the opportunity so as not to disappoint the mentor or felt the task was less unsurmountable because there was a foothold from which to begin. Students finding success using campus resources on their own would be more likely to seek them out on their own. This action demonstrates the growth of the student by advocating on their own.

Both mentor and mentee addressed how this idea of advocacy was present in private meetings. During the focus group, Mentor E stated that he often described himself as a cheerleader of sorts. He felt that the simple act of being supportive and encouraging was very helpful. He used the word "self confidence" in terms of his advocacy goals. He connected how students need to feel so that they can be successful, and that he wanted to try to build that confidence so they would aim for success. Student 1 in her interview identified these actions

with terms like Student 2 who described her mentor as nice and friendly on the surface, but when drilling down on the depth of the relationship she acknowledged that there was much more to it. A term that she used to describe her mentor which would have been beneficial for an advocate was non-judgmental. The student could ask those “dumb questions” as she put it and not feel dumb herself. Student 1 stated that her mentor was constantly affirming by praising her grades and commenting that she belonged at the university and had much to offer. This process included how many mentors would validate the mentees and they would try to encourage them to build self-confidence. Advocacy grew student self-confidence and was very empowering.

Mentor D also stated that his role of advocate for the mentee was designed to lead the student towards self-sufficiency. Sometimes, it appears that the mentor took the role as an alternative to being a parent, although never stating those words. Student 3 stated that he went to his mentor rather than his parent when dealing with administrative items at college, “my parents are busy and really don’t understand how things work in college, that is why I go to the mentor.” This might include talking with a faculty member, registering for classes, or meeting with an academic advisor.

Focusing on trying to meet student needs is from where Mentor B felt these actions of advocacy stemmed. Any student certainly needs assistance in many areas from a mentor, but often he or she also just needs to know there is at least one person at the university concerned for his or her well-being. Student 4 encompassed advocacy and mentorship well when he said that his mentor went the extra mile for him. The mentor did a lot more than just talk to the student, and he helped the mentee in many other aspects at the university.

**Major Theme 1: Conclusion.** One of the most significant supporting findings of this theme is that three of the students who have finished the official program are still regularly in



contact with their mentor. The mentors were described as a trusted person who the students can share anything with even to this day. The relationship was described by the students as a safe bond with a person that the mentee could talk to without feeling judged. One student made the following observation about the steadfastness of the relationship: He had been part of a sports team and quit, and after that point, he felt ignored by the coaches even though when he was on the team he felt connected. With the mentor, the opposite occurred. Even though the official program was over, the relationship remained.

## **Major Theme 2: Mentoring Reduced Barriers and Self-Isolating Behaviors Which Were Hindering Student Socialization and Acclimation**

A significant and common issue that most of the students mentioned in their personal interviews was that upon coming to college, they felt alone or isolated. This isolation was a significant barrier to the student's ability to socially connect. In this major theme, issues of race and feeling disconnected were most prevalent by the mentee. Mentors described working with students to address these behaviors based on where the student was in their isolation and changing their tactics as students progressed. In this major theme that addresses student isolation, three subthemes emerged that include students' adjustment to a PWI Christian university, mentors providing positive reinforcement to overcoming isolation, and mentors serving as a life coach to broaden the range of support as a mentor.

**Subtheme 2A. Mentors facilitated cultural adjustments to the PWI Christian university.** Students described how difficult it was to come to a PWI campus for the first time. Several including Student 2 did not realize how little racial diversity there was at this college, "when I visited the college it was at night and there were no students since it was during a break." Although sometimes this feeling has been described as being simply homesick, from

these student interviews it appears to be much more. Being part of a campus lacking in diversity, seemed to heighten this stressful transition greatly. Although at least one student acknowledged that at times the isolation may have been somewhat self-imposed, it was certainly a reality that caused significant barriers to students' social connections. Students identified that their race caused them to feel isolated.

Each student in this study attended a high school that was either racially diverse or primarily African American. One of the students had no idea how little diversity existed at the university, and stated that their admissions visit was during a break time so there were no students on campus. Commonly, these students found refuge in behaviors that included going home each weekend, staying secluded in their residence hall room, and remaining quiet in class.

Each student has a slightly different story, of course, but the similarities are great. For instance, Student 4 was from a great distance away, and so for him it was difficult to retreat home. The other three students lived more locally and either still or at one time travelled home each weekend. Mentor C stated that wanting to flee home on the weekend was a concerning but common behavior, and he was working with a student at the time of the focus group dealing with just this topic. "It is common for students to want to go home and almost retreat each weekend, I try to stop that" (Mentor C).

In addressing student isolation, mentors encouraged students to face and overcome issues that were causing isolation. One of the stories shared by Student 2 was how embarrassed she was by her hair. Like the others, this student attended a university with a strong racial balance, but when she arrived on campus, the balance no longer existed. Each weekend the student went home and straightened her hair. This African American student described her natural hair as

being curly and unlike the others in her room and classes. She stated that she “did not feel like she belonged on the campus.”

Student 2 was also the mentee that was able to best reflect on the idea of self-isolation. She used this exact term when she stated that she knew that much of her isolation early on was “self-imposed.” She had no logical reason to feel isolated; she had not had any issue that she could relate that caused her to remove herself, but yet she did. Her mentor was able to see that and identify her reaction to the culture of the campus. In her interview, she stated that even after she fully understood the extent of it being self-imposed, changing her isolation was still a struggle. “I really had to work to overcome such a less diverse environment,” stated Student 2.

Mentor C uses a lot of his own experience when talking with students on this topic. He was clear in the focus group that students should know they are not alone in this struggle. He has faced it himself, and they will face it along with many other students. He described how some students must deal with what he called a “duel culture.” This occurs when the culture at the college is different from at home and in the student’s home social groups. He felt that this confusion of culture, between home and college, is in itself an isolating experience. The student feels alone at college, but will also start feeling disconnected at home as well.

A significant cultural factor that every student interview discussed as well as being included in the mentor focus group was Christian faith. At this university, faith is a major part of the institution. Although most other cultural items appear to have been a cause for isolation, faith appears to have the opposite effect. Three of the four students mentioned in their interview that faith was a factor in their choice of university, and they received encouragement from family for this reason. Student 3 attended a Christian high school, and so in some ways this constant did

make the transition easier for that individual. “I was used to the bible classes and chapel, but this college is still very different than my high school” (Student 3).

**Subtheme 2B. A successful mentorship relationship provides positive reinforcement to the mentee.** Mentors actively sought to encourage students to reduce their isolation by using positive reinforcement as a tool to create more self-confidence, academic resilience, and connections to faculty. Mentees reported that they were often hesitant to act the first or second time they were encouraged to make these moves, but after repeated encouragement, students started moving out of their comfort zone and isolation. Students appeared to be affected by the positive reinforcement, it often counterbalanced the negativity the student was feeling internally. Having this positive reinforcement repeated again and again, the student seemed to slowly listen to their mentor, take it to heart, and then act upon it.

Mentors clearly identified this common concern of low self-confidence, and it often was one of the first items reportedly addressed. One of the strategies used to overcome this to help the student build their own self-identity and self-worth is the use of positive reinforcement. Academic failures, both previous and current caused some students to feel like failures and not worthy to be at the college. Both mentors and mentees acknowledged that some of this is typical in any transition to college; however, all felt that for African American students it was typically much worse at this PWI Christian college. At this sort of university, the isolating factor increased, there are more to overcome.

Mentor A stated that in her experience most students in their academic transition will have failure or at least less success than in high school, “I tell them this is normal, but you need to rebound.” This can cause self-confidence to diminish. It was clear that overcoming these early pitfalls is important. This is where she encouraged the mentee to connect to faculty. This

was often difficult because as Student 2 stated, she was isolating herself in class as well. She stated in her interview that she routinely sat in the back of class, remaining silent and never communicating with anyone.

Isolating oneself in class appears to be an easy habit for every student to fall into. Several of the students commented that they started their college experience sitting in the back of the class and remaining quiet. Even if they knew the answer to the question, which was often, they did not participate. Several mentors and mentees stated that these sorts of interactions were commonly discussed. One mentor described working with a student where step one was to answer one question. Step 2 was to connect with a faculty member outside of class, and step three to join a study group of others in the class. What was once thought impossible became a reality, which made students feel much more open to participating in class in a meaningful way and to then do the same thing in more classes.

Strategies that are often employed to increase student success include connecting with faculty, being engaged in class, and joining student study groups. Both Student 1 and 2 in their private interviews stated that grades were very important to them; they both knew they needed to do all of the suggested tasks, but felt they could not. Student 2 stated that one time she met with her mentor and they made the goal of asking or answering just one question in one class, “she just told me that I need to do this and asked about it every time we met.” It took several classes before she did so, but once she was successful, she started to grow in her interactions.

**Subtheme 2C. Mentors were a valuable life coach for mentees.** Reaching out to roommates and peers was a common activity that mentees were challenged to do by their mentors. Often this was described as simply being in the same space as a roommate and grew into asking him/her questions, doing things together, and being willing to try to trust them as

friends. From this, mentees grew in their comfort of communicating with more students in an informal setting. For instance, one student used the example of walking down the hall and saying hi to other students, including those who they did not know well or at all and having these greetings returned.

One of the repeating suggestions that came up with many mentors and mentees was the student being encouraged to connect with roommates. Student 2 related how connecting with her roommate was very beneficial to improving her social connections. The mentor continually asked questions about the roommates, and the student claimed “they seemed very nice” but there was still little interaction on her part. The mentor offered simple challenges like eating a meal with her roommates, asking them basic questions, etc. The mentee tried and this line of connecting with the roommate went well. Upon returning from home one weekend without her hair straightened, one of the roommates asked if her hair was naturally curly as she was wearing it. After confirming this, the roommate commented that she should continue to wear it curly and natural because it was so pretty. The student never straightened her hair again as a growing friendship was blossoming between the roommates. This story accomplished many things, including building the student’s self-worth. As stated, feeling different altered students’ self-identity. Mentors helped students grow in their own self-confidence and self-respect, encouraging them to take pride in their self-identities. In accomplishing this, mentors encouraged students to overcome negative experiences such as academic failures and incidents where they felt they were sticking out.

Several of the students described at least one situation where they felt there had been a racial incident involving themselves. The students described that their first reaction was to flee; they wanted to hide and often retreated to their residence hall rooms. Sometimes, the mentor

was able to help the student evaluate what really happened to determine if the event in question was actually race based and how they could then respond. Both mentor and mentee described this being a time when guidance was needed by the student to navigate the situation successfully. While events were often initially perceived to be race based, they were not actually so. Either way the mentor was significant in supporting the student. In response to experiences such as this each student shared that the thought of transferring was very prevalent was changing colleges was a real option. Universities that were more diverse were often a desired choice. Of the students in this study, the relationship with the mentor was described as a factor in deciding to stay.

**Major Theme 2: Conclusion.** As described, behaviors of the students often created isolation. Students described staying in their residence hall rooms and going home each weekend. Even though some of the students described this as being self-imposed, it was a barrier to becoming more social. Helping students adjust to the culture of the campus, being a positive supporter, and serving as a life coach to the student provided significant support in reducing the amount of isolation that the student was enduring. Once the isolation was minimized, the student was ready to grow in his/her connection with the university and its members.

### **Major Theme 3. Mentoring Encouraged Greater Student Involvement in Both Academic and Cocurricular Participation**

In this last major theme, students went beyond the motions of removing isolation and grew into meaningful participation. The increased relationship with the mentor provided more influence and once the students became less isolated, they were ready for their social connections to grow even more. This participation was meant to get the student engaged and involved with

the university. Goals included continued academic growth as they found social outlets that included cocurricular activities. Ultimately, the outcomes included students with a much stronger connection to their university. What was once thought of as unreasonable, undesired, and impossible became for each of the mentees a reality. Students moved from an outsider to an insider as Tinto (2017) describes by increasing their social networks with the new and different students they were able to connect with by being actively involved in different University activities.

### **Subtheme 3A. Participation in academic activities is essential for success.**

Participation in academic activities is essential for success. Although previous themes encouraged students to academically engage, this subtheme took the general action to a much more important and more meaningful connection. Mentors intentionally encouraged students to make meaningful connections in their academic classes and programs. The type of academic involvement that was discussed mostly included study groups, participation in class, and engaging in a meaningful way with faculty and classmates.

Previously, we talked about Student B who had been given the goal from her mentor of starting with the small task of answering a question in class. The student disclosed that she often knew the answer but was previously unwilling to participate, “I knew the answer but I just could not raise my hand to answer it.” She stated in her interview that she could not even talk to the student sitting next to her let alone answer a question in front of everyone. There was no way she was going to go to a study group, although even from the start she wanted to do so. Her grades and academic success were very important to her, but she could not gather the strength to participate.



She then described a semester of growing confidence after meeting with her mentor and that she was comfortably participating in student study groups. Her mentor was helpful in encouraging her to get over the anxiety to participate. Not only does she participate, but she was proud to mention in her interview that she has co-lead groups and has suggested students form a group when she is in a class that is difficult to her. She stated that this participation has both helped her increase her academic success in the classes but she also enjoys the classes more. It appears that having a better relationship with her classmates and instructors became helpful in both her class achievement and enjoyment.

Mentor C talked in regards to a mentee he was paired with who was a very strong student, but lacked self-confidence, “she does not realize how bright she is.” In each meeting, he stated they would discuss the classes she was in and would focus on her involvement in the class. Again, the importance of asking questions in class, talking with the instructor after class and in the professor’s office was encouraged. He stated that she started by sending an email to the professor, then asked a question after class, and finally evolved to a point where she occasionally asked a question during the class. There is a difference between the mentee asking a question just to interact verses what this subtheme demonstrates which is a more meaningful interaction where the student is getting their academic needs met. The first is just the action of doing, meaning the student seems to be so uneasy of the action, the real content is lost. Once the student can over this fear, the content of the question can be more meaningful. The student is not just trying to interact but rather spending their energy to better understand the material, thus growing in their academic experience.

Student 3 described in his interview how his confidence to interact with others in his class continued to grow and spread. Where once he too stayed quiet in class, never answering a

question unless called upon, he not only was engaging more with the professor but with his classmates. This continued outside of the classroom. The student stated that he started to say hi in the hallway to his classmates, “I just walk down the hall and any I pass that I know, even if they are not a friend I still say hi.” These are not peers he even included as friends; however, he is growing in his socialization as he was socially branching out to more students. The student was growing out of his isolation, the ground work from the mentor was paying off as the student was freely interacting socially with a greater group of students.

Another key outcome as described by Mentor C was as the student engaged more with the faculty often that student gained another advocate. He related a story in the focus group of how key faculty members started interacting with his mentees. As this happens, the student has now gained other advocates that will assist in the student’s success, “students started to see that there are a lot more people here that will help them out than just me.” This has several significant points, first the student is able to see that not only are they not alone, but they have many people who want them to be successful. Although the mentor did not go away for this student, they were able to find others who can serve as mini mentors as well providing support and advocacy.

**Subtheme 3B. Membership in university cocurricular entities is important.** A common suggestion from mentors to mentees was to join a club or organization. The college administration offers a wide range of clubs that focus on both academic, social interests, and faith growth. Mentors described that this was a strategy that would encourage the student to meet and interact with other students. With the wide variety of options, often there was at least one or two that could be suggested that the student might find interesting. However, most mentees stated that this was a push; many never followed through and stayed active in the club.

One of the common reasons that students did not participate more was that their increased social connections created friends which they spent time with which resulted in there not being enough time to participate in the club. Student 2 stated that although she went to a meeting or two for a few clubs, and they seemed to be a good opportunity, her growing friend base along with her studies took most of her time. “I went like once for twice, it looked cool and the people were nice, I just didn’t have the time to join” (Student 2). The success of the mentor in encouraging the student to build relationships caused the student to not have enough time to participate in the club.

During the mentor focus group, all five indicated that they tried to get their student involved. Not unlike the engagement they universally suggested in the classroom, which started as a way to reduce isolation, out of the classroom activities were identified as a major source of social engagement and connection. Clubs and organizations provide a wide range of offerings and Student 1 and 2 remarked that they were really pushed to be part of one. Student 1 who is a freshman stated she looked into one or two but never joined one. This student appears to not be as socially advanced as other older students in this study. Student 2, stated she looked seriously at one or two and had even joined one, but was not active anymore because she stated she was too busy. She did state she was able to meet a few new people and, in her words, “it was fun when I was there.”

Student 3 and 4 were currently or previously part of an intercollegiate athletic team. Being part of a team was a significant slice of these students’ social connections at the university. Although both mentors and mentees stated that connections within the team might have been the easiest made, mentors encouraged the students to stay on the team and be as active as possible. The team often was a great source of support to the student, often highlighting just

how disconnected the student was from the rest of the campus. Although the student might feel connected with the team, once they step away from it they feel a strong isolation from a broader community that is not diverse.

In addition to the cocurricular and athletic opportunities, mentors also encouraged students to get involved in the faith community that the college leaders provided. Faith has been a common thread of multiple themes; however, as connected to this subtheme, faith became more the personal connection that the student had and less about a way to generally connect with the university. Student 3 stated that faith was a very big part of his family, and that his parent was a pastor, “faith is a big part of my life.” As he was able to feel more connected at the university, his ability to connect via his faith grew. Suggestions from mentors included joining small Bible studies and other faith group events. It appears this allowed him to grow in his own self-identity and be more himself in the fact he was interacting with others in the way he had prior to attending college. His mentor, who was a member of a different Christian denomination as reported by the mentee, supported and encouraged this growth during its faith maturation at college.

**Subtheme 3C. Improved connection within the university aids in assimilation.** One of the clearest signs that a student has made a significant turn to building their social connections is when they start identifying the university as “their”. All four of the mentees stated that they came to the university feeling much like an outsider; however, through the course of their time at the university their connections grew at different levels and so did the way they identified with the university. All four of the mentees were at different places in terms of from where they started, although all did identify, at least minimally, with a growing feeling of becoming an insider as described by Tinto (2017).

The encouragement that mentors applied in subtheme 3A and 3B appeared to have significant outcomes, which included students connecting to the university as their own. Students acknowledged a growing pride in the college, which resulted in personal ownership. A mindset changed from viewing the university as an institution that “I attend” to “my institution.” The use of social media gave a window into the student’s feeling about this. Student 2 described in her interview that she now posts on social media regarding the college. The student took a picture of a billboard advertising the college and posted excitedly that the billboard included her roommate at her college. She shared this with great pride.

Student 4 shared how this manifested itself for him in regards to this athletic team. There was a large tournament on campus and for the first time he wanted his friends from high school to come watch his game at his campus, “I invited them to come and I was really glad they did.” He seemed to feel asking his friends come to the game was a significant risk, as the Student’s 2 cultures would be meeting. The tournament went well, his friends were impressed with the college and team. In Student 4’s words, this was when he really felt that this was his college.

**Major Theme 3: Conclusion.** The mentees that were in this study appear to be still evolving and growing. Evidence from student interviews showed that these students are connecting with the college as an insider more than before being mentored. Mentors quite purposefully encouraged mentees to engage with the university in various ways and the outcomes were extremely beneficial. The more a student engaged with others on campus, the more comfortable they were in pursuing social connections at the university and the more comfortable they were at identifying the campus as their own. Their circles continue to widen as they utilize the tactics and skills encouraged by the mentors.

Student 3 is a testament to the importance of mentoring programs for African American minority students. The experience was so powerful in his life that he wanted to help others. The student stated that he mentors high school age students and tries to prepare these students for college. He is very proud to identify himself as a member of the university, wearing college branded apparel often. Being a mentor has increased this student's confidence and allowed him to connect even more with the university community by being a vocal representative of higher education.

### **Mentoring Socialization Flow**

Some of the themes evolving from this research are not surprising. One with little insight might be able to guess at these outcomes; however, the interconnection of the themes and how one builds on the other is a significant outcome and finding. Each of the major themes and subthemes within have a purpose in helping the student grow and develop. Although not totally linear, this connection of themes is identified in each student's interview and supported by both focus groups. Each of the four mentees demonstrated this interconnected flow that vastly improved their socialization on campus.

In this progression, as described in Figure 2, the student starts by building a relationship with a mentor that grows from trust and respect into one in which the mentee feels comfortable seeking non-academic advice. The mentee values the mentor's opinion enough to listen and act upon the suggestions (major theme 1). In this step (subtheme 1A) the trust grows as the relation develops. The mentor is able to provide advice that helps the student make good decisions (subtheme 1B). In addition, the mentor's actions of advocacy begin that provides support but also student growth as the depth of the student trust in the mentor expands (subtheme 1C). The

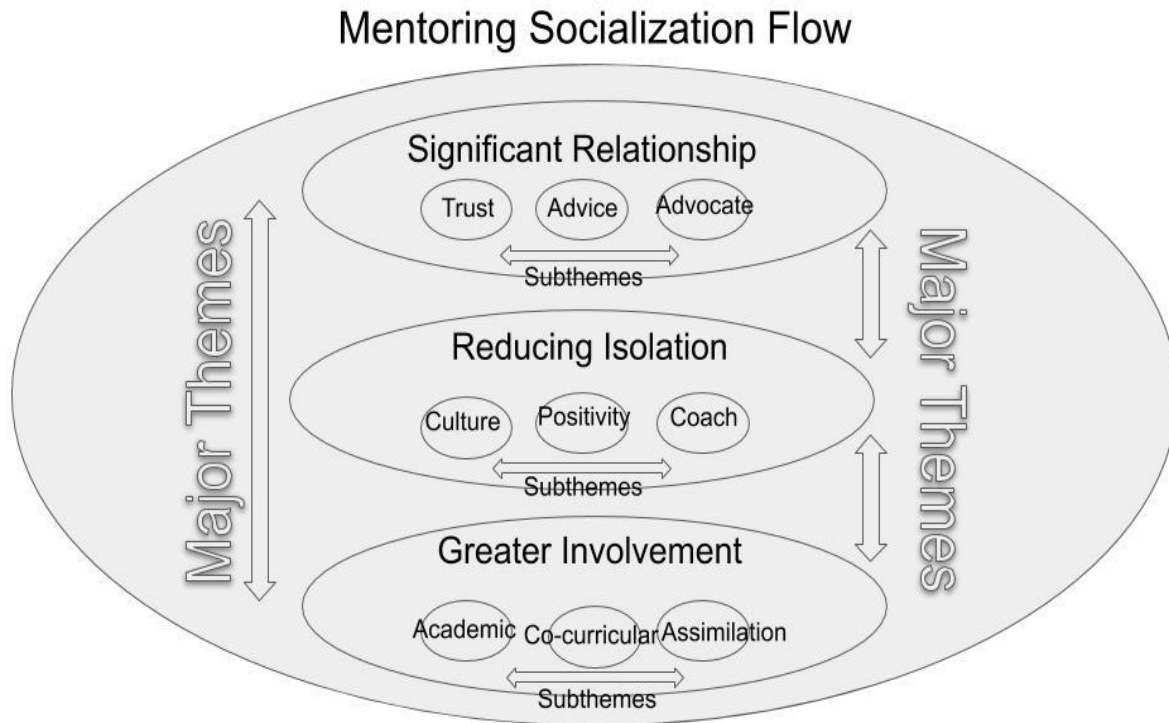
three subthemes work together in the process of growing the overall relationship of the mentor and mentee.

As the relationship has developed, the mentor begins to both identify and address the student's sense of isolation. In this step identified in major theme 2, a major focus of addressing the student's isolation often appeared. This was dealt within the three subthemes, the first specifically dealt with the focus of adjustment to the PWI Christian college. The second focused more on a strong and consistent positive reinforcement. The last of the subthemes position the mentor as a life coach, providing support in all areas of the student's life. These three subthemes worked interconnectedly to address the major theme of addressing student isolation.

As the student mentor relationship grew, and barriers to isolation were addressed, the last major theme of the encouragement for students to get involved emerged. This major theme had a new purpose of creating meaningful relationships, opposed to simply becoming less isolated. Subtheme 3A encouraged the student to engage in academic activities, while subtheme 3B focused on non-academic cocurricular involvement. And finally, subtheme 3C took the effort of the student finding support throughout the university. These three subthemes again support and grows the major theme.

What the study was able to identify was how the themes, both major and sub, worked together in a process that was of great success for the student. Within each major theme, the three subthemes worked interconnectedly to build and grow the major theme. In addition, the major themes also worked interconnectedly and built upon themselves. For instance, as the relationship grew, and the student addressed isolation as part of major theme 2, it strengthened major theme 1 as well. This was true in term of the effect of major theme 3, as it developed, so

did its effect on growth of major theme 1 and 2. Figure 2 shows this interconnected flow of both the major and subthemes.



*Figure 2.* Graphical view of the interconnection of the mentoring socialization flow.

Figure 2 shows how the subthemes work within the major themes and how the larger themes work together as well. The themes build from each other while growing themselves from the success of the other themes. Refer to Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 for the full description of each major theme and the corresponding subthemes.

### **Summary**

The impacts on an African American student's social connections from a professional mentor at a Christian PWI are significant. This study identified three major thematic concepts: connection to mentor, overcoming isolation, and encouraging involvement. These themes, along with their subthemes collectively assisted students in becoming more connected at the institution



through their social connections. This connection included being more involved in classes and in the campus community. Students grew in their self-identity, giving them confidence to be more social. Each of the students in this study are socially more connected than they were prior to mentoring. The themes and subthemes build upon each other and strengthen themselves the mentoring process evolves.

Although each student was able to grow significantly, each was in a different stage of their college career when interviewed. Some were close to graduation while Student 1, was a freshman and still on the brink of whether she would stay or leave. Mentoring does not guarantee student success in either social or academic ways. She has grown much, but it is still unknown if she will be able to socially thrive, although academically she is doing well. Others, like Students 2 and 3, are closer to the end, have significant goals in the future of graduate school and leadership on their team. Mentoring allowed each of the students to grow while attending the college and all claim that they would not be where they are now if not for their mentor. Effective mentoring appears to have served both these students and the university well.

Chapter 5 draws a conclusion to this study by conducting a thorough review of the data results. This analyzation includes interpretations of the data that includes more insight in what that the data means and how the research relates to African American students at Christian PWI. This also includes limited insights to mentoring in general that can be applied to a wider application. Chapter 5 also connects these findings to relevant literature, including a small set of new studies that have been published since the writing of chapter 2.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

In this final chapter, study results are reviewed and evaluated. In Chapter 4, results were generally discussed, but in this chapter the analysis includes evaluation, implications, personal insight, and interpretation of the findings. Additionally, connections from the data to existing literature are examined and discussed as they pertain to the relevant body of literature. Identifiable limitations and key implications for practice follow. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future study and a final conclusion.

### **Summary of the Results**

This study investigated the impact of mentoring programs at a PWI Christian college on African American students' socialization. The research question that this study seeks to answer is: RQ1; How does professional mentoring impact an African American student's social connections at a Christian PWI? The conceptual framework which served as a foundation for the research question was Boyer's (1990) six communities from his book *In Search of Community*. Using Boyer's theory, the research question afforded a look at the broader issue of Christian PWI colleges' abilities to create a more diverse student population (Reyes, 2013). Many universities in a PWI demographic have an aspiration to become more diverse and are challenged by recruiting and retaining a diverse population (Pérez, 2013).

The literature supports both the need and desire of PWI Christian colleges to become more diverse (Pérez, 2013). Small to mid-size colleges have made progress through programs that include mentoring activities (Dahlvig, 2010). In 2015, Gallup identified six major factors that encourage students to be more engaged at their college:

1. a professor who made them excited about learning
2. professors who cared about them as people

3. a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams
4. work on a long-term academic project
5. a job or internship where they applied what they were learning
6. involvement in extra-curricular activities (Busteed, 2015, p. 4).

The research found that the more engagement opportunities students have to support them, the more likely they will be an active, engaged participant in the college or university (Busteed, 2015). Students who are more engaged at their college are more likely to graduate, have greater satisfaction as a student, and be more involved in cocurricular activities at the campus (Busteed, 2015). Student satisfaction and campus involvement are often outcomes of successful mentoring programs, and this study supports the importance of such programs. The literature indicated that mentoring minority students provides the groundwork for success at all types of colleges, including large public universities (Hu & Ma, 2010; Sato et al., 2018), HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Thompson-Rogers et al., 2018), and small PWIs (Paredes-Collins, 2009). Evidence suggests that a well-developed mentoring program is more successful, but even small programs are more valuable than none (Absher, 2009).

The literature continues to validate the success of mentoring for African American students at PWI Christian colleges. Supporting the power of mentoring for minority college students, one study examined the impact that supportive appraisal from mentors has on underrepresented students transitioning into college (Hurd, Albright, Wittrup, Negrete, & Billingsley, 2018). This study found that students who received appraisals reported fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety than their peers. This study of students at PWIs demonstrated the overall improvement in well-being that a student can gain from a mentoring program.

A second study focused on collegiate social connections among Hispanic students. It evaluated the impact of peer mentors and found that students saw their mentors as social capital, meaning the mentor relationship was a starting point for further socialization. Students with mentors in this study reported a higher sense of integration and connection at the college than those who did not have a mentor, supporting the overall advantages students gain from university mentoring programs (Moschetti, Plunkett, Efrat, & Yuomtov, 2018).

This study, as outlined in Chapter 3, followed a qualitative single case study design that collected data via semistructured interviews of African American students who participated in a mentoring program at the chosen university within the two years prior to data collection. Additional data were collected via separate focus groups with program mentors and students. Triangulation was achieved by adding a third source of data—key program documents that primarily included program descriptions and a few mentor resources (Creswell, 2014).

This study revealed three key impacts of mentoring on student socialization, and also indicated how research outcomes are interconnected to support the success of African American students attending a Christian PWI. The first key social impact was a student's development of a strong connection to the mentor, the second was a student overcoming isolation, and the third was student encouragement for increased campus community involvement. These three outcomes, identified as major themes, also included three subthemes. Within each major theme, the subthemes supported the major themes.

The three major themes also built on each other. Major theme 1 evolved and influenced major theme 2 which then further strengthened itself and also impacted major theme 3. For instance, Student 2 explained that the more she was around her mentor the more she started to “really like her.” As the relationship grew, the mentor challenged her with ideas and activities,

many that addressed her isolation from the campus. Creating the relationship came first and then it was used to positively influence the student's actions. Student 2 successfully reduced her isolation by following the mentor's recommendation to join a student group, and consequently, she trusted her mentor even more. The interconnection of the themes relates to Boyer (1990) and this research study's conceptual framework in the sense that all six communities and themes are not isolated but work together to support the student's success. These findings are similar to much of the existing literature which describe how a trusted mentor becomes a very influential person to the student (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Baber, 2012). These results validate the importance of a quality mentoring program in supporting African American students attending a PWI Christian college.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The results of this study provide insight into the significance that quality mentoring can have upon African American students at a Christian PWI. The research question focused on the impact of social connections, even though the university mentoring program from which participants were recruited was built around academic support services. The students in this study found success in growth of their social connections both inside and outside of the classroom. The mentors themselves became significant influences in many areas of the four students' lives in this study.

This section interprets outcomes from the research goals. In doing this, practical and theoretical implications of mentoring and social outcomes are explored. Research goals and objectives are framed by the research question: How does professional mentoring impact an African American student's social connections at a Christian PWI? Interpretation of the research data offers rationale and explanation for why results manifested as they did.

Data collection from this study came from three main sources: interviews, focus groups, and key documents. This research collection design provided a triangulation of data (Creswell, 2014). Each of these provided a different response type and level of insight into the research question. The student and the mentor focus group interviews were productive data gathering methods that provided detailed feedback both in quality and quantity of data. Both of these collection methods provided rich data in which the participants reflected on personal experiences (Creswell, 2014). The student focus group provided validation of the general themes, but did not provide much new data. Participants were often reluctant to speak in front of other students with whom they did not have a relationship. While key documents were a third source for data triangulation, they were sparse and documents like emails between the mentor and mentee offered little bearing or insight into the research question (Yin, 2018).

As described in Chapter 4, the results identified three major themes that included three subthemes. Themes resulted from clear data trends within the coding, and subthemes became foundational components that supplied and supported trustworthiness for the main themes. Appendix H is a complete listing of the major themes with the accompanying subthemes. The three major themes revolved around the relationship strength, how student isolation was addressed by the mentor, and lastly advocacy for the mentee's social interaction with other peers and within the campus community. Although these major themes appear to be somewhat common sense, the way they interconnect and build to support the social connections of the student provide a much deeper result than expected. This interconnection of the themes helps to answer the research question and provide insight into how mentoring impacted the social connections of the students.

## **Major Theme 1: A Significant and Lasting Relationship was Created Between Mentees and Mentors that Established Trust and a Circle of Influence**

The first major theme centered on the relationship between just the mentor and mentee. In this first stage, the mentor appeared to be a significant person of social contact for the student. As the two continued building a relationship, the three sub points became evident. These three were based on growing trust, seeking and providing sound advice, and student advocacy. Each of these subthemes were present and significant for each student; however, they were not necessarily mentioned or emphasized equally during the individual student interviews. Although the major themes appeared to occur in the same chronological order, the subthemes emerged in different orders depending on the individual and the mentoring pairs' circumstances. This study also pointed to the importance of relationships in building socialization. The core relationship of the pair was possibly the most significant key to student development.

Through effective mentoring, relationships became important, but major theme one exposed just how important relationships were to successful mentoring. As stated in Chapter 4, the student mentees valued and relied on the fact they had built this relationship. Although it took time, and in some cases the student appeared to struggle, the mentor was able to help the student much more than simply filling some time on their weekly calendar. This was a relevant item to emerge in this study because it was such an important part of the connection and basis of successful mentoring. Major theme 1 (significant relationship) and its subthemes contributed to the student's growth and impact of socialization, serving as the basis of all future successes within the mentoring process.

**Subtheme 1A: Trust was a necessary component in the mentorship bond.** The first subtheme revolved around the level of trust in the relationship; this was not surprising because

trust is an important part of any meaningful relationship. How the trust was built differed in each relationship, but was the result of positive interpersonal actions and grew from following the mentor's advice. The mentor gained influence in the student's life with the growing trust between them. In general, the most important ingredient for trust building success was simply time and effort invested by the mentor. Mentors were aware of the need for students to trust them, but themselves did not need this component for the relationship to be successful. Mentors were willing to serve students even before the student was willing to be served, because it took longer for the student to trust the mentor.

**Subtheme 1B: The mentor provided sound advice to help the mentee make positive decisions.** The second subtheme for major theme 1 involved the mentors giving solid advice to enable the student to make positive decisions. The mentor leveraged the growing relationship and took the opportunity to advise the student regarding his or her personal, social, and academic growth. The mentor was engaged in both the advising process and outcome. The mentor's investment was clearly helpful in fostering trust which encouraged the mentee to listen and follow the advice given. The mentor was not always right, but in all cases of the study the mentor had the best interest of the student in mind.

**Subtheme 1C: The mentor became an advocate on behalf of the mentee within the university.** The last subtheme of major theme 1 is based on the mentor's role in advocating for the student throughout the campus. In many ways this endeared the mentor to the mentee as it was made clear that the student's success was important to the mentor. During the focus group, Mentor D stated that he felt advocacy was an important part of the mentoring process. The mentor's value grows from an appointment on the calendar to a source of care and support for the student. When the relationship matured to this point, a positive and personal relationship had



developed between the pair and both parties actively sought out the other. The mentor was invested in the mentee's success, and in turn, the mentee appreciated the efforts on his or her behalf and trusted and heeded the advice even more.

## **Major Theme 2: Mentoring Reduced Barriers and Self-Isolating Behaviors Which were Hindering Student Socialization and Acclimation**

The second major theme involved isolation reduction. In this study, all of the students were African American students attending the same Christian PWI, and each of the four identified feeling isolated and disconnected from campus. These experiences and feelings were a significant barrier to building social connections. What this appears to show is that once the mentor created a strong enough relationship with the mentee, it became evident that isolation was the most significant roadblock for the mentee. Unlike major theme 1, which is likely true in any mentoring setting, this major theme was be more case specific to this study. The biggest issue that these students faced was isolation; however, given a different setting this might change.

**Subtheme 2A: Mentors facilitated cultural adjustments to the PWI Christian university.** The first of the subthemes for major theme 2 involved adjustment to the PWI Christian environment. Adjusting to the culture of the PWI Christian college was a challenge for these individuals, but in a different circumstance the subtheme would apply to the alternate culture. In Harper and Gasman's (2008) study, the value of mentoring was visible at a HBCU, a place that typically is not a PWI, but any higher education community can be foreign to any student in any setting. Navigation is a challenge to any student as they begin a new experience. A new environment will cause some level of crisis to the student, and crisis is a contributing factor to isolation and lack of socialization.

**Subtheme 2B: A successful mentorship relationship provides positive reinforcement to the mentee.** The second subtheme deals with how the mentor provided positive reinforcement to the mentee. This provides insight into how challenging it can be for African American students to adjust at a Christian PWI. As described in Chapter 4, Student 2 clearly stated that her isolation was significantly self-imposed, however she was unable to break out of that with support. It took significant prodding over time before the mentor's encouragement was successful. This feeling of being alone and putting oneself into his or her own corner is a natural reaction for many people experiencing a radical change in environment or circumstance be it college, a new job, moving to a new city, or any other change. This trap of isolation was so powerful that the student was unable to overcome it herself. Her lack of engagement to the community is related in Student 2's story.

**Subtheme 2C: Mentors were a valuable life coach for mentees.** The last subtheme of this major theme (life coach) puts the mentor in a role of providing important life information to the mentee. This subtheme would be more common among wider mentoring environments. By nature, a mentor is someone that typically has sufficient subject knowledge and life experiences that can help the mentee. Often, we think of this subtheme as the basis of mentoring in general; however, in this subtheme we see that a mentor is not nearly as effective until a positive relationship is built. The actions of subtheme 3C (connection to university resources) helps improve major theme 2 (reducing self-isolation) but also continues to grow the personal relationship of major theme 1 (significant relationships). The student feels a strong sense of connection with the mentor as they reveal their wisdom. If this wisdom comes too soon in the mentoring relationship, it may be ignored, rejected, or lost by the mentee.

### **Major Theme 3: Mentoring Encouraged Greater Student Involvement in Both Academic and Cocurricular Participation**

The third major theme speaks to meaningful involvement by the student in university activities. Each mentor that was part of this study identified this as a significant strategy to helping his or her mentee, and each kept this as part of their ongoing conversation. While themes 2 and 3 both deal with increasing student involvement by reducing their isolation, theme three reflects a student who is much more engaged and willingly involved in the university experience. In this theme the student did not ask questions of the instructor to satisfy the mentor's request to participate in class, but rather formed significant and meaningful questions because the knowledge benefited the student personally. In this final major theme, the three subthemes continued to follow trend and add depth and specificity.

**Subtheme 3A: Participation in academic activities is essential for success.** The first of these subthemes reflects the primary purpose of mentoring and that is to pave the way for a student's academic success at university. Both individuals in the partnership keep academic success at the forefront of their conversations and activities. While students in this study did not necessarily mention this foci specifically during discussions, it was evident that academic success was a primary goal of increased class participation. Even with the focus of social connections, academics were interwoven purposefully because so much of university learning and academic growth involves social interaction.

**Subtheme 3B: Membership in university cocurricular entities is important.** The second subtheme supports the idea that membership in a cocurricular is significant. Again, in this subtheme we see a much deeper connection with the university. Membership implies an active involvement and is more than just showing up to a meeting. A member must actively

contribute and engage. In this connection the student cannot just sit in the back of the room, but rather must become an involved member who makes meaningful contributions and interacts with other students. This certainly pushed the student to a much greater and meaningful social connection with peers in interactions in a student chosen cocurricular.

**Subtheme 3C: Improved connection within the university aids in assimilation.** The last of the subthemes involved the student assimilating with the university. This step appeared to take some time and will not be achieved by success in one area. This is a process that is embedded within all of the themes and will ebb and flow as the student progresses with their comfort within the university. In many ways this is one of the ultimate goals of this sort of mentoring program. All of the students certainly became more assimilated into the university as a result of the mentoring program but this occurred to different degrees. Some students claimed to feel like an insider within the university, but their responses showed a vulnerability still existed and they were at risk of reverting back into isolationist behaviors, such as going home each weekend and hiding in their residence hall room each night. Because changing student behaviors and beliefs is an ongoing process and a complicated one at that, a successful mentorship program must be a lengthy program instead of a short-term fix.

### **Interconnection of the Themes**

In Chapter 4, the visual Mentoring Socialization Flow was introduced as way to show how these three major themes and nine subthemes are simultaneously interconnected and foundational. At the onset of the study, the circle-like fashion in which the themes built upon and confirmed each other was not expected. They are conceptually connected to Boyer (1990) in how different outcome, themes in this study and communities with Boyer are needed to provide success to each other. Figure 2 is a visual representation of this process. Each subtheme built

and strengthened the other subthemes within the main themes to ultimately strengthen the overall main theme. These are not linear themes which emerge chronologically, but rather appear simultaneously with others and grow with and from each other. The growth and development of one assisted in achieving another, but as the second developed, it also improved on the first theme.

This interconnection became important in the significance of how one major theme's role impacted the other. As described in major theme 1, the focus on a significant relationship is very important for the mentor to be successful with both major theme 2 (removing barriers of self-isolation) and three (greater student involvement). However, as the mentorship relationship moved into these subsequent phases, it built on these other goals as well as continued to build the relationship. In this study, as the student became more connected to the university, the student was still growing the relationship with his or her mentor. This was true even as the frequency of the mentorship meetings lessened.

This interconnection within the mentor process was a significant item to understand; it outlined significant procedural steps that increased the odds of a successful mentoring relationship. First of all, it highlighted the importance of the relationship between the two parties. Without a significant relationship, the mentor is less likely to be effective and most likely will have a smaller stake in the student's success. It would appear that the need for a successful and strong relationship where the two parties respect and trust one another is universal in the mentoring process. Any successful mentoring must first build such a relationship prior to attempting to accomplish anything else.

Once the mentor has a high level of influence on the mentee gained through the relationship building process, the mentor is able to leverage their role in addressing the student's

most significant issue impacting success. In the case of this study, as part of subtheme 2 (overcoming isolation) this issue was clearly the isolation the student was facing within the college community. In each of the students interviewed as part of this study, the issue of isolation was identified as one of the most significant barriers to growing social connections university wide. The mentors' ability to identify the mentee's crisis is critical in providing support in the most meaningful and targeted way. The mentor must be attuned to identifying and capable of addressing his or her mentee's particular difficulty.

One last observation in this mentor/mentee relationship is in regards to the most significant and generally most desired outcomes. In this study, socialization and how the mentees connected to others was the focus. However, one of the subthemes in major theme 3 (meaningful involvement) identified the fact that academic success was significant as well, and typically, was identified as one of the greater goals. These outcomes were seen in the context of increased and more meaningful student interactions in academic settings. Certainly, the student's successful social connections were happening in conjunction with being a successful student.

Positive results appear to have a lot to do with an individual's eventual mentor. The personal characteristics of the mentors and the cohesiveness of the match between mentee and mentor are inherent to mentoring success. In this study, the program did not support a large population of students, and all of the mentors were volunteers. Having a limited number of volunteer mentors is significant. Those who serve in this role do so simply because they enjoy mentoring and care about students. Generally speaking, people who volunteer for this type of position are better mentors than those fulfilling part of an established job description or a

required element of faculty service, and those who are paid are also possibly motivated extrinsically rather than with an inherent desire to serve.

Successful mentoring programs must be well aware of who they are using as mentors and how those mentors are motivated. In this case, they were volunteers involved because of their great interest in students and their individual ability to connect to students. It appears a key reason that this program, with its limited training and structure, is as successful as it is, hinges upon the outstanding mentors that participate. These individuals as a whole were very successful in mentoring. Clearly an important factor of a mentoring program of this kind is how the college leaders recruits and appoints mentors. Selection of mentors becomes critical for program and student success.

In addition to finding the correct mentor, the process of matching a mentor to a mentee appears to increase effective, impactful social connections for African American students at a Christian PWI. A mentor who has the skill set to be a successful mentor will most likely be a better mentor than someone who does not have these skills. Research supports the idea of common race between partners (Madyun et al., 2013) and supports the idea of a common gender to help with building relationships (Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009). This study supports this idea of strategic matching; however, the connection points went beyond just race. The commonalities also included gender and other items important to the student such as being a first-generation college student, athletic involvement, and other common interests.

### **Discussion of the Results: Conclusion**

Although this mentoring program was created with the focus of improving academic success, the key program documents painted a focus that was much broader. The program sought to strengthen and support academic skills such as time management, study skills,

academic resources, test prep, and collegiality. However, the key program documents also mention a focus on cocurricular involvement and social connections. Mentors in the focus groups had limited mentorship training, so even though key documents laid out these important topics, the application of these strategies were often left to the individual mentor to implement. Typically, this would be a red flag for the organization and limit success of this particular mentoring program, because better organized programs appear to produce better results (Brittian et al., 2009). Despite this, the program was successful based on the outcomes of the students that were part of it. Such success appears to come from the quality of the mentors and not the program structure.

This study discovered several themes that demonstrated increased socialization from mentoring. Each had what they would describe as a positive experience. The research question is answered from these findings in a roundabout way. Improved socialization came from the process of mentoring, where this slow interpersonal relationship where the student grew more connected to their mentor and college. The impacts, or answers to the research question, included a stronger sense of belonging or feelings of being an insider (Tinto, 2017) where the student wants to connect socially.

This research followed a single case study format where purposeful sampling was used to determine the students that would be included in the study. Students that fit the pre-set criteria were those that identified as African American, participated in this mentoring program within the last two years, and possessed a willingness to participate in the study. The results of the study from the four that finally participated were overall positive. While each may have experienced different levels of success from the mentoring, each one indicated they were more socially



connected because of the experience. Each of the four still had a positive relationship with their mentor, although it did differ among the four how frequently they interacted with that person.

### **Discussion of the Results in the Relation to the Literature**

The issue or question of this study was to determine the impact of mentoring on social connections for African American students at PWI Christian colleges. In understanding this question, it is important to both understand the issues that impact social connections as well as how mentoring can be an effective way to improve the state of socialization of these students. The findings of this research are consistent on both of these central questions. These findings supported the role of mentoring and the positive outcomes achieved.

From both historical and current literature, minority students have identified struggles at PWI colleges (Waller et al., 2011). Students often report the feeling of not being connected and having a sense of isolation. Examples include students spending large amounts of time in their residence hall rooms and going home on the weekends when possible.

Such struggles are often seen in poor enrollments and low retention rates (Absher, 2009). Per Tinto (2017), retention is influenced by many things, including this idea of being connected to one's campus. He describes this as moving from the idea of "the college I attend" to "my college." Conceptually, this transition was seen in this study. Instead of focusing on the larger picture of retention, this study focused on a single element of social connections: mentoring. While research has identified the positive effects of mentoring at a similar college (Dahlvig, 2010), other studies have shown general support for positive effects that mentoring can have on a student (Brittian et al., 2009). Mentoring is shown to be a successful tool for many students, not just those experiencing crisis. Freeman's (1999) work is an example of how mentoring can be effective to high achieving students who might not be in the same crisis as other students. Such

mentoring also appears to be true for students whether attending a PWI (McGovney-Ingram, et al., 2011) or diverse large public colleges (Hu & Ma, 2010).

From the research, mentoring generally appears to be a positive tool in just about any setting, serving about any student. Just as this study demonstrated positive findings, the literature repeatedly found success in different settings such as large public universities (Watt, 2006), small private institutions (Freeman, 1999), and even HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Thompson-Rogers et al., 2018). Implications of practice show that mentoring appears to be an important resource universally applied to all places. Although well-designed programs will typically perform better, even a little organization and training most likely will have some positive impact upon the students they serve.

### **Connection of the Major Findings to the Literature**

This study provided three main themes as outcomes which revolve around significant and lasting relationships, the role of mentor in reducing barriers and student isolation, and mentors encouraging greater student engagement. Each of these three themes are present in the existing literature and support the research finding. Although the contexts are slightly different, the basic ideas are very similar and should be noted as support for the findings.

**Major Theme 1: A significant and lasting relationship was created between mentees and mentors that established trust and a circle of influence.** Often at the heart of mentoring relationships is the foundational role of a significant relationship. Waller's et al. work (2011) supports the idea that the relationship is key and without it, students will not feel connected to their mentors or institution. Bowman et al. (2015) work that focuses on the role of ethnic clubs found that the connection which student members made was a key factor in their continued involvement and ultimate success.

**Major Theme 2: Mentoring reduced barriers and self-isolating behaviors which hindered student socialization and acclimation.** In this study participants stated that isolation in some cases was self-inflicted. This is supported by Kim and Hargrove (2013) who state African American students at a Christian PWI must combat more social obstacles than their white classmates. Mentoring has also been found to create opportunities for students to increase engagement that reduces isolation (Oaks et al., 2013).

**Major Theme 3: Mentoring encouraged greater student involvement in both academic and cocurricular participation.** This last theme addresses an outcome of greater student engagement where the student is excelling socially. Tinto (2017) speaks to a student who is engaged and goes from being an outsider to an insider. This might be the sudden change of perspective from the “college I attend” to the reference of “my college”. In a similar study, Dahlvig (2010) speaks to the additional confidence and growth of engagement that students from a different PWI Christian college gained from their experiences.

### **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

Studies such as this have much to share in terms of the implications for the future of African American students’ success at private Christian PWIs. This includes items such as future research discussed later in this chapter, as well as items that relate to practice, policy, and theory that college administrators should keep in mind when creating student support programs. Although mentoring is a common practice, widening the lens from solely minority students’ academic success to building social networks and building active members of the campus community could provide even greater outcomes for an even larger student population.

The case study research conducted as part of this dissertation demonstrated the positive and specific impact that mentoring can have on students in building social connections.

University officials wishing to improve the educational experience of African American students need to understand both the need for a student to have solid social connections as well as how to assist the student in this connection process. In connecting mentoring to Boyer (1990), a student's success in growing a social connection with his or her mentor will include all three themes, just as Boyer described a community's six parts. These implications in the context of a college community is related to the study's findings in the context of practice, policy, and theory.

### **Practice**

The implications of this study includes one of a practical application. Both the literature and this study's outcomes demonstrate significant benefits for African American students attending a PWI Christian college that are in a mentoring program. College administrators that are interested in supporting their students could consider the creation of such programs, both formally as well as encouraging more information relationships that support students. These programs are not new; many colleges already have such programs based on the number of studies that speak to this topic. Mentoring of students has been successful in many different sorts of colleges, in both one-on-one and in groups, and with a wide range of different desired outcomes including those with academic and social foci.

Given the success of mentoring in different types of colleges and universities that the literature has shown, student growth can be achieved in just about any post-secondary setting. Although the context of this study was one of a private Christian PWI, the literature does demonstrate success in different contexts at large public colleges (Hu & Ma, 2010; Sato et al., 2018) and HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Thompson-Rogers et al., 2018). Although the campus makeup is very different with these dissimilar types of colleges from the one in our

study, the practice of mentoring to engage in a one-on-one relationship using a faculty/staff member of the university has demonstrated significant, supportive outcomes for students.

Mentoring, in terms of the process and practice of serving students has also been studied in different formats that include both a one-on-one by a professional employee (Dahlvig, 2010), one-on-one by a peer mentor (Ward et al., 2014), and in situations of one to many in the concept of an advisor such as in the context of a student group (Bowman et al., 2015). Typically, a one-on-one arrangement is most often thought of when thinking of mentoring. This arrangement often allows for a more private setting where the student feels freer to share with the mentor. In this study, Student 2 stated that she could meet with her mentor behind closed doors and since it was just the two of them where she could say anything. The practice of peer mentoring allows for the relatability and commonality that the peer shares with the mentee given they are living through similar experiences simultaneously. The advisor relationship allows for a single professional to impact a larger group of students, although not typically with the same level of personal relationship that a one-on-one mentoring relationship would afford. The student group also allows for informal peer mentoring, so in this case the student might be getting both professional and peer mentors.

The practice of mentoring can have a wide range of specific goals and outcomes for both the mentor and mentee. In this study, the outcome was focused on social connections, despite the mentoring program of this study being primarily focused on increasing academic success. Student 3 stated that he was told this was to help him with grades, but it went much further in helping him feel integrated into the campus. He stated that he was very nervous going to college with all of the academic demands, and the lack of diversity was more difficult than he had imagined. The mentor was very helpful to him in both areas, even though he was not expecting

anything but academic assistance at the beginning. Having a practice that identifies main objectives is often common, but clearly this study supports that the outcomes can be much further reaching. Mentoring programs often focus on retention, graduation rates, and academic success. This study identifies that items such as social connections can serve as building blocks to larger student success including these larger goals.

As identified in this study in major theme 1 (role of the personal relationship of the pair), the interpersonal relationship is a critical and fundamental foundation of a successful mentoring rapport. Student 1 in this study stated it well when she said “I really trust my mentor. He wants what is best for me.” This trust is built within the major theme 1 of the mentoring flow (Figure 2) which needs to be a fundamental part of the act and practice of mentoring. Program designers must understand that this process might take time, and the results of mentoring are often not quick to show results. In addition, a program should be very intentional on how a mentoring pair is selected. This study identified that successful pairs found a commonality, such as gender, athletic affinity, prior relations and first generation to college. The literature also points to the positive effect a mentor of the same race has with students (Madyun et al., 2013). College leaders should consider providing resources in order to properly create and train their mentors, which should provide a better outcome of the entire mentoring cycle (Brittian et al., 2009).

As described above, if university leadership desires increased diversity than as a matter of practice, the college administration should begin the creation of a mentoring program for its African American students. Institution leaders should start small by finding a handful of dedicated employees and match them the best they can with students. A program has to start at some size, even if the scope is not the final desired outcome, having a desire to engage the practice of mentoring must act.

## **Policy**

A university's policy often reflects its values and can be considered an actionable reflection of such. Christian college leaders who have made becoming more diverse a priority have had a mixed bag of success (Pérez, 2013). Certainly, the creation of mentoring programs such as that described in this study and as in the literature is a tool university leaders could use. The implication of such programs is that even when a college is an extreme PWI, those African Americans that are in attendance will be retained in higher numbers, and then this student base could be the foundation for expanded diversity.

University policy can take on many directives, including strategic plans that strive for goals that include both diversity and overall enrollment goals, retention, and student satisfaction. Policies can dictate expectations like meeting certain measurements and outcomes. Mentoring, often thought of as a service, might very well be used as a tool to comply with such policy. College leaders are well served to use programs that include mentoring in their planning of policy development.

Policies that are based on fixed statistical outcomes are used to both define a policy but also to measure the desired outcomes. A policy designed to simply boost a more diverse campus enrollment needs to focus on both the recruitment and retention of the students impacted. Policies that are more rounded should consider how to support a minority student. College leaders should consider how programs like mentoring can support a student holistically, as long as university administrators must understand that mentoring takes time to work and with a one-on-one design may not be what an administrator considers efficient. The program requires a great amount of human capital since typically mentoring is a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and mentee.

Policy must be careful not to overstep itself by attempting to overextend its usefulness, as well as not understanding its own constraints. Where a policy appears to cause harm in mentoring is when it attempts to reshape the program itself. An example would be where a policy creates a mandatory mentoring program. In such a case, all students, or a subset of students, would be required to participate. A significant issue with such a policy might be the perception of isolating African American students even more. Several of the students in this study identified either feeling this sense of sticking out or a fear of that happening. Mentor C clearly stated this issue when identifying that a program that was “for the black kids only” would not work because students would feel that the college administration thinks of these students as less capable of success than the general student. Best practice for policy should allow access for all students, including how the individual needs of these students drive how the support is delivered.

In addition to the operational pieces of a policy impacted by mentoring, it is also important to consider core college policies such as mission. The university in this study, a private Christian PWI, is highly impacted by its mission. Each of the students in this study identified with the faith community of the college. Student 4 stated that he had attended a Christian high school and that being at a Christian college was a good fit. He stated that “faith is a big part of my life and my mentor always included it.” Successful policy must derive from the university’s mission, including the organization of programs like mentoring. Since mentoring often strives for general goals of student development, growth, and academic success, mission alignment should not be significantly difficult.

College leaders wishing to start a mentoring program should be mindful of the previous conversation regarding policy and be willing to jump in with limited structure. Policy is both



important in providing sound practice as well as consistency. Even with the importance of policy, it is more important for a program to be created than to have policy so complete as to address every conceivable issue. Policy can be edited and revised, but a lack of any program at all is the greater problem. Although policy is important and should not be forgotten, mentoring's positive outcomes outweigh the lengthy process of complete policy development.

## **Theory**

Socially connecting students as described by Tinto (2017) is a significant factor in the students' overall success including their satisfaction, academic success, and retention. An implication of this study is that mentoring appears to be a factor that can improve African American students' social connections thus, per Tinto (2017), potentially improve the participating students' collegiate satisfaction, academic success, and retention. The conceptual framework for this study was Boyer's communities (1990); theoretically, this implies that mentoring follows this framework, and that addressing these six communities are more effective.

Mentoring does have a theoretical component that both a successful program and individual mentor should understand. Although successful mentors must be authentic, how that mentor processes through mentoring theory might differ. The stages that are followed will stay similar between individuals. In this study, a concept entitled the mentoring flow was described. In this theory, three main steps or themes describe the mentoring relationship that follows. The theory, as described in Chapter 4, found and illustrated in figure 2, is based on the relationship that the mentee has with the mentor. The role of the mentor serves to build relationships with the mentee, but then they must leverage that relationship to help guide the student through the college ecosystem.

This study aimed to explore outcomes of social connections, the idea that how a student connects socially with the community is a key to how well that student will be satisfied with their college, as well as how well these social connections will contribute to other factors such as academic success, retention, and graduation (Tinto, 2017). Although the population of this study was focused around African American students at PWI colleges, other studies have demonstrated that students need support in growing more connected through mentoring at racially balanced public colleges (Hu & Ma, 2010; Sato et al., 2018) and HBCU (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Thompson-Rogers et al., 2018). Mentoring appears to have wide application to many settings to improve the social connections of the effected student.

The conceptual framework of this dissertation applies Boyer's communities to mentoring. This student development theory outlines how the complete student experience is a wide range of six different communities. Mentoring was seen in this study to cultivate community aligning with Boyer's theory. With alignment was first seen with the mentor and then extending out into other parts of the university community. The mentor was critical in being the one to help guide the student through both the mentoring flow (figure 2) and Boyer's communities.

The mentoring theory described above supports students by successfully growing their socialization. This theory should encourage college leaders to act by including mentoring as part of any organization plan to both grow and support a diverse campus. Students are more successful at a college where they feel connected. Since the theory is based on the one-to-one interaction of a mentoring pair, students who participate, regardless of the size of the program, will benefit.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was able to identify findings that have to do with the mentor relationship. Although the research supported positive outcomes similar to this study, such as overcoming isolation (Pérez, 2013), the significance of the relationship between mentee and mentor was surprising. The depth and importance of the relationship to the participants may be the most significant finding and an area for more research. With this in mind, both the idea of how to make the best match and what makes the best mentor should be a focus of future research. In terms of the mentoring relationship, some questions to consider for future study include (a) a deeper dive into the long-term impact of the relation of mentoring pair looking at each individually; (b) how might mentors consider mentees friends after the formal program ended, and how socially healthy is that relationship; (c) were mentees too dependent on mentors, and if so was this reliance due to their social connection; and (d) did the student become less reliant or the relationship less significant as the social connections grew outside of the mentoring relationship.

In studying how to best match mentor and mentee, previous studies have looked at aligning demographics such as race (Sinanan, 2016) and gender (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). Although much of this was affirmed within the student interviews of this study, the study also went further in exploring the foundations of the relationships of the mentor and mentee that transcended these demographic matches. A PWI Christian college often does not have as many African American full-time employees to mentor students, so other factors must be used in matching. Future research could follow a similar structure, but instead of focusing on social connections, look at any connection points between the two parties, primarily what are the factors that make this relationship more connected and successful.

Taking studies of mentorship one-step further, another focus could be on the characteristics of good mentors. In this study, the mentoring program had little to no vetting or training system. Professional full-time faculty and staff volunteered for this service. They were given absolutely no compensation and those who participated in the focus group were all thankful for the experience. For whatever reason, this group of mentors inherently had the traits to be successful. In this, the question of motivation could be included to see if a clear connection was present between a mentor's intrinsic desire to mentor and the success they have with a mentee.

### **Conclusion**

The study goal was to analyze mentoring by full time professional faculty and staff of African American students to investigate what impact this had on their social connections. The setting was significant to this study because the institution is historically and currently a significantly PWI Christian university in the Midwest. Leaders of Colleges, such as this one, desire to become more diverse, though many have found this difficult due to issues of poor retention and low student satisfaction which become barriers to success (Absher, 2009; Griffith et al., 2019).

In this qualitative study, students were interviewed about their personal experiences with mentoring to determine whether it impacted them personally and/or academically. Although the program that was studied was originally designed to serve students with low academic achievement, the study showed that students were gaining much more. The top three findings included items that impact students' social connections: the connection to their mentor, overcoming isolation, and encouraging involvement. Although not every student in this study is

as successful as they could be, each indicated that they are far more successful than they would have been if not for their mentor.

At the start of this research, questions had few answers. In the end, amazing students and mentors who participated in the study were willing to share their personal story and journey at a PWI Christian university. What they shared revealed important, meaningful data and findings that are actionable and will serve future students. The findings also demonstrated the successes of a small program that needs to be highlighted, expanded, and most importantly, replicated. This research might add to the body of literature; however, it should not be the last study of its kind. More study needs to be done within this topic of mentoring and support of African American students at PWI Christian institutions.

## References

- Absher, B. M. (2009). Attraction and retention of females and minorities in christian higher education. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 18(2), 160–189.  
doi:10.1080/10656210903046416
- American Psychological Association. (2016). *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Ash, A. N., & Schreiner, L. A. (2016). Pathways to success for students of color in christian colleges: The role of institutional integrity and sense of community. *Christian Higher Education*, 15(1–2), 38–61. doi:10.1080/15363759.2015.1106356
- Baber, L. D. (2012). A qualitative inquiry on the multidimensional racial development among first-year African American college students attending a predominately white institution. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 81(1), 67–81. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/1017540960?accountid=10249>
- Beard, K. V., & Julion, W. A. (2016). Does race still matter in nursing? The narratives of African American nursing faculty members. *Nursing Outlook*, 64, 583–596.
- Benishek, L. A., Bieschke, K. J., Park, J., & Slattery, S. M. (2004). A multicultural feminist model of mentoring. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 32, 428–442. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/194006068?accountid=10249>

- Berkhalter, D. (2018). A commitment to diversity: The journey of two christian colleges developing an explicit institutional commitment to diversity (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (UMI No. 10843216)
- Bosco, M. A. (2012). Improving retention rates: one college's stride toward improvement. *College and University*, 88(1), 2–8.
- Boyer, E. (1990). *Campus Life: In Search of Community*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Bowman, N. A., Park, J. J., & Denson, N. (2015). Student involvement in ethnic student organizations: Examining civic outcomes 6 years after graduation. *Research in Higher Education*, 56(2), 127–145. doi:10.1007/s11162-014-9353-8
- Brinson, J., & Kottler, J. (1993). Cross-cultural mentoring in counselor education: A strategy. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 32(4), 241–254.
- Brittian, A. S., Sy, S. R., & Stokes, J. E. (2009). Mentoring: implications for African American college students. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 33(2), 87–97.
- Brooks, M., Jones, C., & Burt, I. (2013). Are African American male undergraduate retention programs successful? En evaluation of an undergraduate African American male retention program. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17(2), 206–221. Retrieved from <https://doi-org.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/10.1007/s12111-012-9233-2>
- Bullis, C., & Bach, B. (1989). Social turning points: An examination of change in organizational identification. Spokane, WA: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association.

- Burrell, J. O., Fleming, L., Fredericks, A. C., & Moore, I. (2015). Domestic and international student matters: The college experiences of black males majoring in engineering at an HBCU. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 84(1), 40–55. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/1699087937?accountid=10249>
- Busteed, B. (2015, April 08). Is college worth it? that depends. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/education/237278/college-worth-depends.aspx>
- Butler, S. K., Evans, M. P., Brooks, M., Williams, C. R., & Bailey, D. F. (2013). Mentoring African American men during their postsecondary and graduate school experiences: implications for the counseling profession. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 91(4), 419–427. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2013.00113.x
- Campbell, T. A., & Campbell, D. E. (1997). Faculty/student mentor program: Effects on academic performance and retention. *Research in Higher Education*, 38(6), 727–742. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/10.1023/A:1024911904627>
- Campbell, T. A., & Campbell, D. E. (2007). Outcomes of mentoring at-risk college students: Gender and ethnic matching effects. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, 15(2), 135–148.
- Cannon, M. A., & Morton, C. H. (2015). God consciousness enacted: Living, moving, and having my being in Him. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 39(2), 147–156. Retrieved from [http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A428998154/AONE?u=switch\\_cu&sid=AONE&xid=35d1b9e5](http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A428998154/AONE?u=switch_cu&sid=AONE&xid=35d1b9e5)



- Casto, C., Caldwell, C., & Salazar, C. F. (2005). Creating mentoring relationships between female faculty and students in counselor education: Guidelines for potential mentees and mentors. *Journal of Counseling and Development : JCD*, 83(3), 331–336. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/219017735?accountid=10249>
- Chen, P. D., Ingram, T. N., & Davis, L. K. (2014). Bridging student engagement and satisfaction: A comparison between historically Black colleges and universities and predominantly white institutions. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83(4), 565–579. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/1684189639?accountid=10249>
- Condon, V. M., Morgan, C. J., Miller, E. W., Mamier, I., Zimmerman, G. J., & Mazhar, W. (2013). A program to enhance recruitment and retention of disadvantaged and ethnically diverse baccalaureate nursing students. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 24(4), 397–407. doi:10.1177/1043659613493437
- Cooper, J. (2016). Excellence beyond athletics: Best practices for enhancing Black male student athletes' educational experiences and outcomes. *Equity & Excellence In Education*, 49(3), 267–183. doi:10.1080/10665684.2016.1194097
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2005). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cross, T., & Slater, R. B. (2004). Black enrollments at the nation's Christian colleges are on the rise. *Christian Higher Education*, 3(4), 391–399. doi:10.1080/15363750490507393
- Dahlvig, J. (2010). Mentoring of African American students at a predominantly white institution (PWI). *Christian Higher Education*, 9(5), 369–395. doi:10.1080/15363750903404266
- Dancy, T. E. (2010). Faith in the unseen: The intersection(s) of spirituality and identity among African American males in college. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 79(3), 416–432.
- Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Lizette, I. C. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 223–236. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/195179649?accountid=10249>
- Drape, T., Anderson, G., Church, A., Jain, S., Slabach, R., & Amaral, R. (2017). Is diversity on their minds? Perceptions of diversity in an undergraduate population using a mixed-methods design. *NACTA Journal*, 61(3), 255–561.
- Ecklund, K. (2013). First-generation social and ethnic minority students in christian universities: Student recommendations for successful support of diverse students. *Christian Higher Education*, 12(3), 159–180. doi:10.1080/15363759.2011.598377
- Estepp, C. M., Velasco, J. G., Culbertson, A. L., & Conner, N. W. (2017). An investigation into mentoring practices of faculty who mentor undergraduate researchers at a Hispanic serving institution. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 16(4), 338–358. doi:10.1177/1538192716661906

- Freeman, K. (1999). No services needed?: The case for mentoring high-achieving African American students. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 74(2), 15–26. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/stable/1493073>
- Gay, L. R., & Airasian, P. W. (2000). *Student guide to accompany educational research: Competencies for analysis and application*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Gershensfeld, S. (2014) A review of undergraduate mentoring programs. *Review of Education Research*, 84(3), 365–391.
- Gordon, J. (2007). What can White faculty do? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(3), 337–347. doi:10.1080/13562510701278682
- Griffith, A. N., Hurd, N. M., & Hussain, S. B. (2019). “I didn’t come to school for this”: A qualitative examination of experiences with race-related stressors and coping responses among black students attending a predominantly white institution. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 34(2), 115–139.
- Guillory, R. M. (2009). American indian/alaska native college student retention strategies. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 33(2), 12–38.
- Gusa, D. L. (2010). White institutional presence: The impact of whiteness on campus climate. *Harvard Educational Review*, 80(4), 464–586.
- Haizlip, B. N. (2012). Addressing the underrepresentation of African Americans in counseling and psychology programs. *College Student Journal*, 46(1), 214–222.
- Harper, S. R. (2013). Am I my brother’s teacher? Black undergraduates, racial socialization, and peer pedagogies in predominantly White postsecondary contexts. *Review of Research in Education*, 37, 183–211.

- Harper, S. R., & Gasman, M. (2008). Consequences of conservatism: Black male undergraduates and the politics of historically Black colleges and universities. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 77(4), 336–351.
- Haywood, J. L. Jr, & Sewell, S. (2016). Against all odds: implications for low income African American males students seeking a college degree at a predominately White college. *Race, Gender & Class*, 23(3), 109–128. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/1899014618?accountid=10249>
- Hu, S., & Ma, Y. (2010). Mentoring and student persistence in college: A study of the Washington state achievers program. *Innovative Higher Education*, 35(5), 329–341. doi:10.1007/s10755-010-9147-7
- Hurd, N., Albright, J., Wittrup, A., Negrete, A., & Billingsley, J. (2018). Appraisal support from natural mentors, self-worth, and psychological distress: Examining the experiences of underrepresented students transitioning through college. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47(5), 1100–1112. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0798-x>
- Kim, E., & Hargrove, D. T. (2013). Deficient or resilient: A critical review of Black male academic success and persistence in higher education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 82(3), 300–311,356. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/1462797413?accountid=10249>
- Lechuga, V. M. (2014). A motivation perspective on faculty mentoring: The notion of “non-intrusive” mentoring practices in science and engineering. *Higher Education*, 68(6), 909–926. doi:10.1007/s10734-014-9751-z

- Lund, J. W. (2007). Successful faculty mentoring relationships at evangelical Christian colleges. *Christian Higher Education*, 6(5), 371–390. doi:10.1080/15363750701285875
- Madyun, N., Williams, S. M., McGee, E. O., & Milner, H. R., IV. (2013). On the importance of African American faculty in higher education: Implications and recommendations. *Educational Foundations*, 27(3/4), 65–84.
- Mangold, W. D., Bean, L. G., Adams, D. J., Schwab, W. A., & Lynch, S. M., (2002). Who goes who stays: An assessment of the effect of a freshmen mentoring and unit registration program on college persistence. *College Student Retention*, 4(2), 95–122.
- McGovney-Ingram, R., Larke, A., & Rutherford, T. (2011). The voices of minority students in an agricultural communications and journalism program: A case study. *Journal of Applied Communications*, 95(2), 21–33. doi:10.4148/1051-0834.1174
- Moschetti, R., Plunkett, S., Efrat, R., & Yomtov, D. (2018). Peer mentoring as social capital for Latina/o college students at a Hispanic-serving institution. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 17(4), 375–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192717702949>
- Nora, A., & Crisp, G. (2007). Mentoring students: Conceptualizing and validating the multi-dimensions of a support system. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 9(3), 337–356.
- Oaks, D., Duckett, K., Suddeth, T., & Kennedy-Phillips, L. (2013). Leadership development and the African American male college student experience. *Journal of College and Character*, 14(4), 331–340. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/10.1515/jcc-2013-0042>
- Okezie, C. E. (2018). The marygrove college griot program: A grow your own program for African American male teachers. *The Urban Review*, 50(2), 235–246. doi:10.1007/s11256-018-0448-y

- Paredes-Collins, K. (2009). Institutional priority for diversity at Christian institutions. *Christian Higher Education*, 8(4), 280–303. doi:10.1080/15363750902821197
- Parker, W. M., Puig, A., Johnson, J., & Anthony, C., Jr. (2016). Black males on White campuses: Still invisible men? *College Student Affairs Journal*, 34(3), 76–92. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/1837174065?accountid=10249>
- Pérez, J. (2013). Diversity at christian colleges: It's about mission. *Christian Higher Education*, 12(1/2), 20–34. doi:10.1080/15363759.2013.739438
- Ramirez, O., Ashley, G., & Cort, M. (2014). What does it mean to be a Christian? Exploring the religious identity of intrinsically and extrinsically religious Black seventh-day adventist university students. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 23(1), 56–69. doi:10.1080/10656219.2013.810558
- Reeder, M. C., & Schmitt, N. (2013). Motivational and judgment predictors of African American academic achievement at PWIs and HBCUs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(1), 29–42. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/1323045218?accountid=10249>
- Reid, K. W. (2013). Understanding the relationships among racial identity, self-efficacy, institutional integration and academic achievement of Black males attending research universities. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 82(1), 75–93. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/1419800317?accountid=10249>

- Reyes, J. R. (2013). Particularity and integration: Understanding of ecocultural niches and their implication for fostering diversity within Christian colleges and universities. *Christian Higher Education*, 12(1/2), 35–50. doi:10.1080/15363759.2013.739441
- Sato, T., Eckert, K. & Turner, S.L. (2018). Perceptions of Black Student Athletes About Academic Mentorship at a Predominantly White Institution in Higher Education. *Urban Review*, 50(4), 559–583.
- Shotton, H. J., Oosahwe, E. S. L., & Cintrón, R. (2007). Stories of success: Experiences of American Indian students in a peer-mentoring retention program. *The Review of Higher Education*, 31(1), 81–107. doi:10.1353/rhe.2007.0060
- Sinanan, A. (2012). Still here: African American male perceptions of social and academic engagement at a 4-year, predominantly White institution of higher learning in southern New Jersey. *Sage Open*, 2(2), 1–7. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244012445212>
- Sinanan, A. (2016). The value and necessity of mentoring African American college students at PWI's. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(8), 155–166. Retrieved from [http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A472680614/LitRC?u=switch\\_cu&sid=LitRC&xid=bb30480c](http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A472680614/LitRC?u=switch_cu&sid=LitRC&xid=bb30480c)
- Small, J. L., & MacDonald-Dennis, C. (2015). *Making meaning: Embracing spirituality, faith, religion, and life purpose in student affairs*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Smith, M., & Mamiseishvili, K. (2016). A christian value? Faculty diversity at southern evangelical campuses. *Christian Higher Education*, 15(3), 153–168. doi:10.1080/15363759.2016.1165154

- Strayhorn, T. L., & Saddler, T. N. (2009). Gender differences in the influence of faculty–student mentoring relationships on satisfaction with college among African Americans. *Journal of African American Studies*, 13(4), 476–493. doi:10.1007/s12111-008-9082-1
- Thompson-Rogers, K., Davis, D. J., Davis-Maye, D., & Turner, C. (2018). Historically black colleges and universities' mentorship of health profession students: A content analysis exploring the north carolina health careers access program. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 6(2), 17–32.
- Tinto, V. (2017). Reflections on student persistence. *Student Success*, 8(2), 1–8. Retrieved from [http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A501403011/AONE?u=switch\\_cu&sid=AONE&xid=f4cf0794](http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A501403011/AONE?u=switch_cu&sid=AONE&xid=f4cf0794)
- Waller, S. N., Costen, W. M., & Wozencraft, A. J. (2011). If we admit them, will they stay?: Understanding the role of social connectedness in the retention of African American students in a recreation and leisure studies program. *Schole*, 26(1), 30–48.
- Ward, E. G., Thomas, E. E., & Disch, W. B. (2014). Mentor service themes emergent in a holistic, undergraduate peer-mentoring experience. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(6), 563–579. doi:10.1353/csd.2014.0058
- Ware, P., & Ramos, J. (2013). First-generation college students: Mentoring through social media. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 2(2), 149–162. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-02-2013-0009
- Waring, C. D. L., & Bordoloi, S. D. (2012). “Hopping on the tips of a trident”: Two graduate students of color reflect on teaching critical content at predominantly White institutions. *Feminist Teacher*, 22(2), 108–124. Retrieved from



[http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A334944243/AONE?u=switch\\_cu&sid=AONE&xid=6078d35f](http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A334944243/AONE?u=switch_cu&sid=AONE&xid=6078d35f)

- Watt, S. K. (2006). The relationship between racial identity attitudes and interpersonal development of African American college peer mentors. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 30(3), 171–180. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/docview/200361445?accountid=10249>
- White, V. M., Alexander, J. H., Prince, D., & Verdell, A. (2018). The impact of student engagement, institutional environment, college preparation, and financial support on the persistence of underrepresented minority students in engineering at a predominately white institution: A perspective from students. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 18(2), 24–38.
- Whitley, D. M., (2018). Recruiting and retaining African American custodial grandparents in university-sponsored research: an opening dialogue. *The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 97(1), 58–66.
- Yarbrough, E. G., Jr., & Brown, U. J., III. (2012). Major determinants of school choice: empirical study. *International Journal of Education Research*, 7(1), 107–119. Retrieved from [http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A299759806/AONE?u=switch\\_cu&sid=AONE&xid=e1616509](http://link.galegroup.com.cuw.ezproxy.switchinc.org/apps/doc/A299759806/AONE?u=switch_cu&sid=AONE&xid=e1616509)
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Zahneis, M. (2018, June 11). Women of color in academe make 67 cents for every dollar paid to White men. Retrieved from [https://www.chronicle.com/article/Women-of-Color-in-Academe-Make/243636?cid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en&elqTrackId=231e3a2ff0c843809ccae6d5150a0310&elq=d84258ef00ff49bdb0409a081eddb7cf&elqaid=19418&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=887](https://www.chronicle.com/article/Women-of-Color-in-Academe-Make/243636?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en&elqTrackId=231e3a2ff0c843809ccae6d5150a0310&elq=d84258ef00ff49bdb0409a081eddb7cf&elqaid=19418&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=887)

Zambrana, R. E., Ray, R., Espino, M., M., Castro, C., Cohon, B., D., & Eliason, J. (2015). “Don’t leave us behind”: The importance of mentoring for underrepresented minority faculty. *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(1), 40–72.

## **Appendix A: List of Interview Questions for Students**

I will be asking you questions that relate to your experience in the university mentoring program.

When I ask about a mentor, unless I explicitly state differently, I am referring to the faculty or staff person that you were assigned to.

1. While you were enrolled in college, how would you describe your experiences with mentors?
2. Because you were in this mentoring program, in what ways did you grow or change?
3. Because of your relationship with your mentor, how would you describe your sense of community and belonging at the university / college?
4. What were things that your mentor did that were helpful in your growth as a college student?
5. Is there anything that you wished your mentor had done that they did not?
6. Are there any items that I did not ask about that you think I should know about regarding social connections in the mentoring program?
7. Do you have anything else to add?

## **Appendix B: List of Focus Group Questions for Mentors**

I will be asking you questions that relate to your experience with the university mentoring program, and specifically mentees that are African American. When I ask about a mentor, unless I explicitly state differently, I am referring to your role with the student you were assigned. When I used the term mentee, I am referring to the student you were assigned to. Focus group participants will be asked to keep other participants and their responses confidential, though a risk exists that such confidence may be bridged. If you want to share a personal experience that they do not want to link themselves or others to, please speak about it in general or non-specific terms.

1. How would you describe your role as mentor?
2. How would you describe your role as mentor to African American students?
3. Describe the strategies you use in mentoring African American students?
4. In your role as a mentor to African American students, what have been your greatest success? Greatest challenge?
5. How would you describe some of the challenges your African American students have to work through or contend with during their time at the college?
6. What do you feel African American students, in general, at the University, excel in building successful social connections?
7. What do you think these same students lack the most?
8. How well do you think mentors can assist students in encouraging their social connections within our University community including peers?
9. What does this program do best in improved student's social connections?

10. What should be done to improve this program to more improve student's social connections?
11. How could the University better equip its mentors to be more effective in helping students in nonacademic issues such as facilitating social connections?
12. What else do you feel is import for me to know about this topic of improving the facilitations of African American student's social connections via mentoring programs?

### **Appendix C: List of Focus Group Questions for Students**

I will be asking you questions that relate to your experience in the university mentoring program, and specifically will be asking questions as a follow up from your individual interviews. Focus group participants will be asked to keep other participants and their responses confidential, though a risk exists that such confidence may be bridged. If a participant wants to share a personal experience that they do not want to link themselves or others to, they should speak about it in general or non-specific terms

1. After reviewing all of your interviews and other data the number one common finding was X. React to that, is this accurate or not?
2. The second most common finding was Y. React to this item, is it accurate or not?
3. Is there any issue or item I have not talked about that you are surprised was not mentioned?
4. Now that the interviews are all over, is there any items that you think you missed telling me that you think should be mentioned?
5. During your interview I asked, how in any way did your mentor build community is there anything more you want to add to this?
6. Any last comments?

## **Appendix D: Recruitment Email to Prospective Student**

Dear (Student),

You have been recommended to me by (Program Director) to be part of a research study that is looking at university mentor programs. This research poses little to no risk to the participants and will provide excellent data to help improve the mentoring program. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview and be part of a one-time focus group.

If you are willing to participate to please reply to this email to set up an orientation meeting with the researcher.

If you have any questions please do so by replying to this this message.

Sincerely,

Steve Taylor, Researcher

Doctoral Student, Concordia University–Portland

## **Appendix E: Recruitment Email to Prospective Mentors**

Dear (Mentor),

You have been recommended to me by (Program Director) to be part of a research study that is looking at university mentor programs. This research poses little to no risk to the participants and will provide excellent data to help improve the mentoring program. Participants will be asked to participate in a one-time focus group of four to six mentors.

If you are willing to participate to please reply to this email to set up an orientation meeting with the researcher.

If you have any questions please do so by replying to this this message.

Sincerely,

Steve Taylor, Researcher

Doctoral Student, Concordia University–Portland



## **Appendix F: Consent Form (student)**

**Research Study Title:** Impact of Professional Mentoring for African American Students at Christian Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)

**Principal Investigator:** Steve Taylor

**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. James Therrell

### **Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this survey is to explore the impact that mentoring can have on student's social connections to campus. We expect approximately four to six mentors to participate. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on March 1st, 2019 and end enrollment on July 1st, 2019. To be in the study Mentors will agree to participate in a one-time focus group exploring the impact of student growth in social connections during participation in mentoring. The focus groups should last about an hour in time. All audio recordings will be deleted after transcription and member checking. All other study related materials will be kept securely for three years and then destroyed.

### **Risks:**

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the investigator's private office. Focus group participants will be asked to keep other participants and their responses confidential, though a risk exists that such confidence may be bridged.

When the investigator looks at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. The investigator will refer to your data with a code that only the principal investigator knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

### **Benefits:**

Information you provide will help improve the quality of the mentoring program. The insight of this study will allow for a wider focus to both improve training for the mentors and improve the overall outcomes for students.

### **Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential by the researcher. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Steve Taylor at email [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [obbranch@cu-portland.edu](mailto:obbranch@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

---

Participant Name

---

Date

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

---

Steve Taylor

Investigator Name

---

Date

---

Investigator Signature

---

Date

Investigator: Steve Taylor; email: [redacted]  
c/o: Professor Dr. James Therrell  
Concordia University–Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221



## **Appendix G: Consent Form (student)**

**Research Study Title:** Impact of Professional Mentoring for African American Students at Christian Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)

**Principal Investigator:** Steve Taylor

**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. James Therrell

### **Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this survey is to explore the impact that mentoring can have on student's social connections to campus. We expect approximately four to five students who have been part of the University mentoring program to participate. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on March 1st, 2019 and end enrollment on July 1st, 2019. To be in the study, students will agree to be interviewed by the researcher. This interview will focus on the students experience with mentoring exploring how it impacted growth in social connections. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and each student will be asked to review the transcription of their interview and be allowed to make edits. After the completion of all interview transcription reviews, each student will participate in a one-time focus group where the results of the interviews will be discussed and elaborated upon. Interviews and the focus group should last about an hour in time. Transcript review should last approximately 10 minutes. All audio recordings will be deleted after transcription and member checking. All other study related materials will be kept securely for three years and then destroyed.

### **Risks:**

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the investigator's private office. Focus group participants will be asked to keep other participants and their responses confidential, though a risk exists that such confidence may be bridged.

When the investigator looks at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. The investigator will refer to your data with a code that only the principal investigator knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

### **Benefits:**

Information you provide will help improve the quality of the mentoring program. The insight of this study will allow for a wider focus to both improve training for the mentors and improve the overall outcomes for students.

**Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential by the researcher. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Steve Taylor at email [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [obranche@cu-portland.edu](mailto:obranche@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Steve Taylor  
Investigator Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Investigator: Steve Taylor; email: [redacted]  
c/o: Professor Dr. James Therrell  
Concordia University–Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221



## **Appendix H: List of Major and Subthemes**

Major Theme 1: A significant and lasting relationship was created between mentees and mentors that established trust and a circle of influence.

Subtheme 1A. Trust was a necessary component in the mentorship bond.

Subtheme 1B. The mentor provided sound advice to help the mentee make positive decisions.

Subtheme 1C. The mentor became an advocate on behalf of the mentee within the university.

Major Theme 2: Mentoring reduced barriers and self-isolating behaviors which were hindering student socialization and acclimation.

Subtheme 2A. Mentors facilitated cultural adjustments to the PWI Christian university.

Subtheme 2B. A successful mentorship relationship provides positive reinforcement to the mentee.

Subtheme 2B. Mentors were a valuable life coach for mentees.

Major Theme 3: Mentoring encouraged greater student involvement in both academic and cocurricular participation.

Subtheme 3A. Participation in academic activities is essential for success.

Subtheme 3B. Membership in university cocurricular entities is important.

Subtheme 3C. Improved connection within the university aids in assimilation.

## **Appendix I: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work

### Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.



---

Digital Signature

---

Steven P. Taylor  
Name (Typed)

---

September 29, 2019  
Date